“THE MUSEUM AS A TOOL TO DEVELOP MAN’S FUTURE”: PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PUBLIC HISTORY IN KANNAPOLIS, NC

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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Industrial heritage displays have attracted a large and growing multidisciplinary body of scholarship, much of which explores the relationships between the politics of deindustrialization and the politics of memory. Industrial heritage museums began to emerge in the late 1970s and early 1980s in concert with widespread deindustrialization, often with the backing of economic development coalitions in the name of economic diversification and postindustrial growth. Scholars have noted that industrial heritage displays represent a marked shift from the industrial museums and exhibitions that proliferated across the Western world in the late-nineteenth century to narrate the social and cultural changes brought by industrialization against the backdrop of shared national pasts. Only a few studies, however, have attempted to examine how museums reflected, navigated, and shaped the changing meaning of industrial environments and industrial workers across the industrial-postindustrial divide. This thesis focuses on a museum project undertaken by the famously paternalistic southern textile manufacturer, Cannon Mills Company of Kannapolis, North

Carolina, during the 1970s – just a few years before the company entered into a series of crises culminating in its much-publicized shutdown in July 2003.

Neither the Cannon Visitor Center nor Cannon Mills Company survived the southern textile industry's deindustrialization. The site of what was for decades among the largest textile mills in the world has been cleared to make space for the North Carolina Research Campus, a biotechnology research complex championed by billionaire David Murdock as Kannapolis's postindustrial salvation. The Cannon Visitor Center's exhibits continue to shape the politics of memory in Kannapolis from their new place in the volunteer-run Kannapolis History Museum in A. L. Brown High School. Rather than serving as a relic of the company's unquestioned power, however, the story of this bygone museum's making is one of a New South company struggling to navigate not just the looming threat of textile imports, but the shifting racial and gender dynamics of the post-Civil Rights Era.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Dr. Campbell and Dr. Burns for letting me talk you into serving as my co-chairs at a time when you were both too busy to chair a thesis committee. I wish I could say that I was so easy to work with that your reluctance turned out to be ill-founded, but I will not soon forget your generosity and commitment to my growth as a historian. Thank you also to Dr. Nash. I enjoyed our several conversations about the history and sociology of labor, and I appreciate your insight and encouragement over these past two years.

Completing this project took me so long that I can hardly remember a time when my consciousness was not consumed with thoughts of Cannon Mills and industrial heritage. However, as is the case with so much of what our minds come to perceive as natural, there is a story full of contingencies behind how I happened upon the Cannon Visitor Center documents in the reading room of the Rubenstein Library at Duke in August 2018. I have never heard of a research grant that comes with not only a place to stay, but free rides to and from the archive, lunches in the ornate Duke University dining hall, an introduction to the archive staff, and, best of all, great company. I received all of this and more from my aunt and uncle, Susan Ross and Tom Hadzor.

I am grateful to the people and institutions who assisted me during my research and made my days of digging one of the most enjoyable parts of this project. Thank you to Josh Rowley at Duke's Rubenstein Library and Shelley McBride, Ed Robinette, and the other volunteers at the Kannapolis History Museum. Thank you also to Jacqueline L. Anthony,

President and CEO of the Kannapolis African-American Museum and Cultural Center, for providing several helpful leads.

Serving as the Graduate Assistant Coach for the Track & Field and Cross Country teams was a highlight of my second stint in Boone. Thank you to the student-athletes (who won, I think it is worth noting, team Sun Belt Conference titles in Men's Cross Country in 2017 and Women's Cross Country in 2018), and, of course, to Coach Mike Curcio, who in addition to coaching me during my undergraduate days at Appalachian State, was my boss and benevolent land baron during my graduate studies.

Working as a Resident Advisor with Appalachian State's Upward Bound program during the summers of 2018-2020 has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. Thank you to the students for, among other things, giving me some faith in America, and to my mentors on the Upward Bound staff, Aaron Gersonde and Kim Grater. Special thanks are due to my UB friends Laura and Marco Fonseca for putting me up on my several trips to Boone this past school year to meet with my committee, drop off library books, and get my computer fixed at the University's remarkably efficient state-run computer healthcare system.

Thank you to my parents for more reasons than I could begin to enumerate here (or anywhere), and to my brother, Harrison, my sister, Elizabeth, and my brother-in-law, the other Will.

And finally, thank you to the people of North Carolina for continuing to financially support public higher education, even in such allegedly valueless pursuits as the study of the past. I certainly hope that I didn't develop any human capital over the course of this project, but for whatever it's worth, I know I developed as a human being.

Dedication

And Lot's wife, of course, was told not to look back where all those people and their homes had been. But she did look back, and I love her for that, because it was so human. So she was turned to a pillar of salt. So it goes.
People aren't supposed to look back. I'm certainly not going to do it anymore.[*]

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

To all the pillars of salt of the earth.

[*] Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or, the Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death.* (1969; repr., New York: Dial Press, 2005), 21-22.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Burdened with emotional significance, the mill has been made a symbol of the New South, its origins, and its promise of salvation. Facts that embarrass this interpretation of cotton mill history have been somewhat neglected.[1]

— C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, 1951

I was 16 years old when I quit school in the 11th grade. It is hard going back to school after 29 years. If I knew back then that this would ever happen, I would go back and change it and do it all over again.[2]

— Debbie Chappell, Kannapolis, NC, 2004

The decline of textile manufacturing in the United States South began in the 1970s, but only in hindsight did the first two decades of deindustrialization in the New South's signature industry come to be understood as the beginning of the end.[3] Waves of mergers, buy-outs, plant closures, and layoffs accompanied a series of crises in the 1980s and early 1990s, sparking headlines such as "Worst Fears of N.C. Workers, Towns Come True" (1986) or "Out in the Cold at Cannon Mills" (1991).[4] When the dust settled, however, the southern textile industry and its most symbolic companies always seemed to be left standing, if not

[1] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 131.

[2] "In Their Own Words," *Charlotte Observer*, July 25, 2004, NewsBank North Carolina.

[3] On deindustrialization and the textile industry since World War II, see Timothy J. Minchin, *Empty Mills: The Fight against Imports and the Decline of the U.S. Textile Industry* (Lanham, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013). For a study of the trend in the textile and apparel industry to look southward for cheap, feminized labor that begins in the New England textile mills of the late nineteenth century, see Beth Anne English, *A Common Thread: Labor, Politics, and Capital Mobility in the Textile Industry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

[4] Bob Glendy Valerie Reitman, Bruce Henderson, "Worst Fears of N.C. Workers, Towns Come True," *Charlotte Observer*, March 15, 1986; Nancy Peckenham, "Out in the Cold at Cannon Mills," *Nation*, September 16, 1991.

quite as sturdily as before. The return of relatively favorable market conditions and the introduction of new labor-displacing machinery inspired an optimism among textile executives that attracted headlines including, "U.S. Textile Industry's Turnaround" (1988) and "Textile Companies Celebrate New Era – Carolinas' Industry Weaves Innovations into a More Promising Future" (1989).[5]

Despite manufacturers' "innovative" use of debt-financing to introduce labor-displacing machinery and their protracted lobbying efforts in pursuit of "job-saving" trade legislation, their "more promising future" did not come to pass. By the early 2000s, the fate of the southern textile industry had become an embarrassing fact that cast a shadow over the Sunbelt success stories emblazoned upon the expanding skylines of cities like Charlotte and Raleigh. As historians David Carlton and Peter Coclanis explained, "The textile industry set a pattern for much of subsequent southern industrialization," meaning that the very political-economic forces responsible for the rapid demise of southern textile manufacturing brought similarly disastrous impacts to workers in other low-wage manufacturing fields across the rural and semi-rural South.[6]

Even the largest textile mill closures registered as little more than a blip in relation to the scale of the industry's decline, but politicians and the media nonetheless elevated a handful of the events taking place in scores of small and mid-sized towns across the southern Piedmont to epitomize, historicize, and monumentalize the end of a once-mighty southern

[5] Leslie Wayne, "U.S. Textile Industry's Turnaround," *New York Times*, February 15, 1988, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Jennifer French, "Textile Companies Celebrate New Era Carolinas Industry Weaves Innovations into a More Promising Future," *Charlotte Observer*, October 21, 1989, NewsBank North Carolina.

[6] David L. Carlton and Peter A. Coclanis, "The Roots of Southern Deindustrialization," *Challenge* 61, no. 5-6 (November 2018): 423, https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/05775132.2018.1543070.

economic and political force (figure 1.1). Perhaps overstepping the meaning of the old maxim that newspapers provide the first draft of history, attorney and North Carolina political insider D. G. Martin went so far as to proclaim in an August 2003 newspaper column: “When historians write about North Carolina's 21st century, there will be an entire chapter titled ‘July 30, 2003.’ On that date, Pillowtex (successor to Cannon Mills) threw in its towel and brought an end to 100 years of a large community's proud dependence on Cannon’s towels and the jobs they created.”[7]

[7] D. G. Martin, "Edwards, Dean and Pillowtex: Three Columns in One," *The Pilot* (Southern Pines, NC), August 15, 2003, NewsBank North Carolina. Parentheses his. Cannon Mills Company was founded as the Cannon Manufacturing Company in 1887 by James W. Cannon. The company’s first mill was located in the town of Concord in Cabarrus County. In 1906, Cannon began construction of a company-owned town seven miles from its original facility on unincorporated farmland at the border of Cabarrus County and Rowan County, which came to be known as Kannapolis. When James Cannon died in 1921, his son, Charles A. Cannon, took control of the firm. Charles Cannon remained at the helm of Cannon Mills until his death in 1971. In 1982, billionaire investor David Murdock purchased a controlling stake in Cannon Mills, only to sell it in 1986 to Cannon’s longtime archrival, Fieldcrest Mills. The firm was known as Fieldcrest Cannon from 1986 until 1997, when it was purchased by Dallas-based textile manufacturer Pillowtex Corporation. Timothy W. Vanderburg, *Cannon Mills and Kannapolis: Persistent Paternalism in a Textile Town* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 7-15, 204.

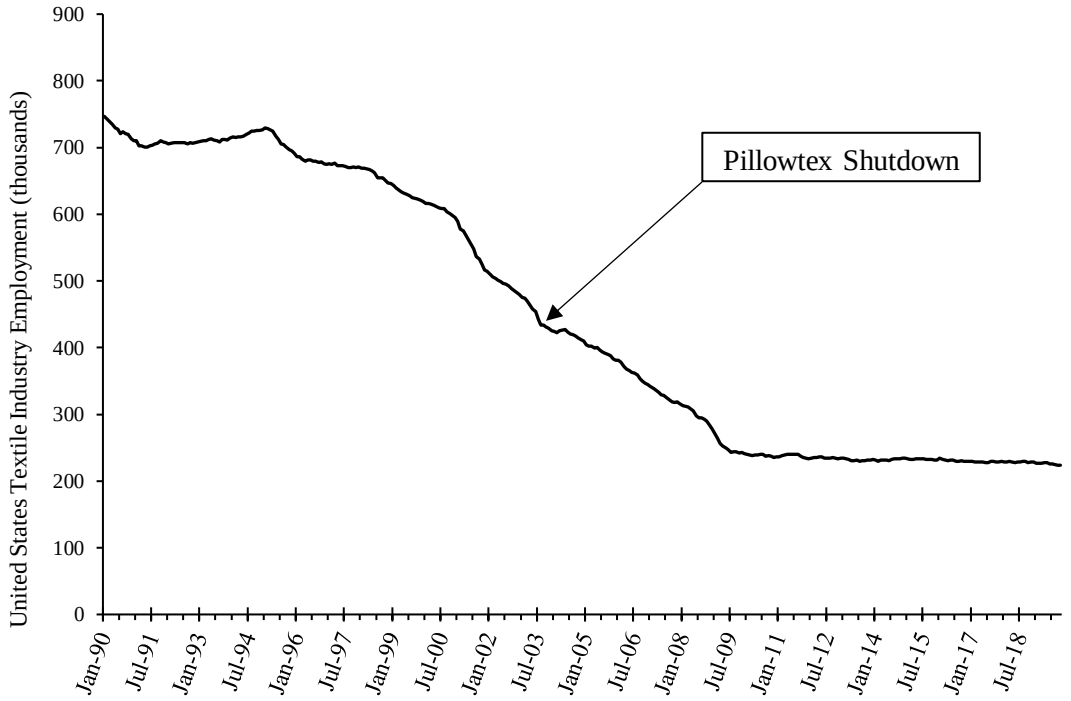

Figure 1.1. Employment in the United States textile industry (NAICS 313) and textile product industry (NAICS 314), 1990-2019. United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved on November 23, 2019, https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/srgate, series CES3231300001 and CES3231400001.

Martin's "proudly dependent" North Carolina community is Kannapolis, a city located 25 miles northeast of downtown Charlotte – squarely in the buckle of the Textile Belt that ran from southern Virginia to Alabama.[8] Cannon Mills and Kannapolis were also at the center of the southern textile industry's symbolism, the result of Cannon Mills' size and, as historian Timothy Vanderburg put it, the firm's "persistent paternalism."[9] Vanderburg argued

[8] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et al., *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (1987; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xxxi-xxxii. The heart of the Textile Belt, also known as the "Textile Crescent" ran along what is now Interstate 85.

[9] Vanderburg, *Cannon Mills and Kannapolis*. Vanderburg's study is the only comprehensive academic history of the company and town. Cannon and Kannapolis have more often been used as a case study within larger studies of three central themes in southern textile historiography: the relationship between paternalism and the struggle to form unions in the southern textile industry; the

that "Cannon Mills exemplified the southern textile firm," but it was the company's seemingly exceptional character that made Cannon Mills and its hometown of Kannapolis lighting rods for discussion, debate, and prognostication about the southern textile industry for much of the twentieth century.[10] From the firm's rise to prominence in the 1920s and lasting through the 1950s, Cannon Mills was exceptional for its size and its well-known brand, which appeared on millions of towels and sheets across the United States thanks to

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desegregation of the textile industry during the 1960s and 1970s; and the impact of deindustrialization for southern textile workers and their communities.

Although Cannon Mills featured prominently in earlier efforts to organize the South, historians have noted its centrality to the Congress of Industrial Organizations' (CIO) underwhelming post-World War II campaign to increase unionization in the South. Rather than build power in southern industries least beholden to the color line, the CIO devoted considerable resources to an ill-fated attempt to score an early victory at Cannon Mills, the largest, most paternalistic, and arguably most virulently anti-union employer in the South. See Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (1988; repr., Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018), 46-61.

Federal action in the 1960s (most notably, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) upended the deeply entrenched racial segregation and in the southern textile industry. Having long been deliberately excluded from the textile industry's famous paternalism, many black workers saw collective action, not the largesse of their new employers, as holding the possibility to create a more just and fair working environment. A comparison of the 1974 and 1985 National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections at Cannon was the subject of a chapter in Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 107-27. In 1974, Cannon Mills was the site of the largest NLRB election in the history of the American textile industry. The company forcefully opposed the organizing drive, and while the Textile Workers' Union of America suffered a narrow defeat, the union outperformed even its own leadership's most optimistic projections. Windham argued that the episode is illustrative of the kind of multiracial working-class activism that has been overlooked in histories of the 1970s, and that the downturn in union activism in the 1980s was not the product of individualism, but of the very real threat of capital flight.

For case studies of Cannon Mills relating to the impacts of deindustrialization, see Cynthia D. Anderson, *Social Consequences of Economic Restructuring in the Textile Industry: Change in a Southern Mill Village* (London: Routledge, 2016); Timothy J. Minchin, "'It Knocked This City to Its Knees': The Closure of Pillowtex Mills in Kannapolis, North Carolina and the Decline of the U.S. Textile Industry," *Labor History* 50, no. 3 (2009), https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00236560903020906.

[10] Vanderburg, *Cannon Mills and Kannapolis*, xi. Vanderburg's study addressed the question of why Cannon maintained its paternalistic system of worker relations after other firms had begun to abandon such practices. He argued that Cannon's brand of paternalism led to the company's dominant market position in the middle decades of the twentieth century but rendered the company inflexible and unable to respond to market forces and federal government interventions in the 1960s-1990s.

vigorous promotional efforts in outlets such as *Life*, *Good Housekeeping,* and *Ladies' Home Journal*. By the 1960s, a company that had once been a symbol of southern business progressivism and innovation began to gain a reputation for resisting an industrywide rollback of paternalistic practices. Commentators attributed Cannon Mills' increasingly exceptional degree of paternalism to the singular influence of Charles Cannon, who led the firm from 1921 until his death in 1971.[11] Harry Golden, the famously liberal Jewish-American author who published the *Carolina Israelite* newspaper from his home in nearby Charlotte wrote in his 1962 book, *You're Entitle'*, "Mr. Cannon is the last of the feudal barons of the twentieth century. Because of his vast holdings in the Cannon Mills, he owns the material town of Kannapolis in the same way that William Faulkner owns the imaginary town of Jefferson in Yoknapatawpha County."[12]

Although labor-liberals criticized the firm's seemingly backward, domineering paternalism during the 1960s and 1970s, neither they nor more mainstream outlets implied that Cannon Mills' outdated management style might threaten its long-term ability to provide for its workers.[13] In a 1976 article about the nationwide decline of company-owned towns

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[11] Charles Cannon gained control of Cannon Mills upon the death of his father, Cannon Mills founder James W. Cannon, in 1921. Charles Cannon ceded the position of President to his longtime protégé, Don Holt, in 1964, but remained a constant presence at the company's Kannapolis headquarters until his death. He was, in fact, working at his desk in Kannapolis when he began to experience the symptoms of the stroke from which he died the next morning. "Charles A. Cannon Dies of Stroke," *Daily Independent* (Kannapolis, NC), April 2, 1971, 1.

[12] Harry Golden, *You're Entitle'* (Cleveland, OH: World Pub. Co., 1962), quoted in Phillip Moeller, "Charles Cannon, Textile Owner, Dies in Kannapolis," *Charlotte Observer*, April 3, 1971, America's News – Historical and Current. On Harry Golden, see Kimberly Marlowe Hartnett, *Carolina Israelite: How Harry Golden Made Us Care About Jews, the South, and Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[13] Liberals found textile paternalism problematic because they believed its "feudalistic" character deprived individuals of freedom and agency. Prevented by the anti-democratic yet communitarian peculiarities of the textile town from exercising control and management over their personal and family affairs, textile workers could not be reliably counted on as responsible citizens in a property-owning democracy. Many working people, however, have not found the erosion of employer

(Kannapolis was the largest company-owned town in the United States when it finally incorporated in 1984), *U.S. News & World Report* accepted that Cannon Mills' rootedness and paternalism could continue to insulate Kannapolis against the ravages of market forces. Noting the firm's efforts to limit the practice of layoffs during adverse market conditions, the segment concluded: "Others claim that the city's growth, which has followed Cannon's continual expansion, is unique among company towns. Often, they say, companies move away or cut operations, dealing a serious blow to the communities."[14]

Such was the case in Kannapolis on July 30, 2003. With police and armed guards on hand, Pillowtex executives assembled a contingent of 75 workers in the basement of the corporate headquarters adjacent to the sprawling complex of textile mills in the city's downtown.[15] They were the first of 4,000 Pillowtex workers in Kannapolis to learn that they had become the most recent additions to the swelling ranks of unemployed textile workers in the South.[16] The *Charlotte Observer* reported of Chief Executive Officer Michael

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responsibility for workers' long-term stability and livelihoods to be preferable to the supposed freedom that comes with becoming subjected to a so-called free labor market. For a history of the twentieth-century employment relationship and the (re)normalization of casual employment (which was never de-normalized for many marginalized American workers unable to gain access to the employer-mediated welfare state), see Louis Hyman, *Temp: How American Work, American Business, and the American Dream Became Temporary* (New York: Viking, 2018).

[14] Lawrence D. Maloney, "Change Comes to the 'Company Town'," *U.S. News & World Report*, December 6, 1976, 70.

[15] Adam Bell Tony Mecia, "Last Hope of a Dying Company," *Charlotte Observer*, July 21, 2004, NewsBank North Carolina. All quotations and statistics in this paragraph appeared in the article.

[16] Kannapolis was by far the largest of Pillowtex's manufacturing hubs, accounting for more than half of its workforce of 7,650 at the time of its liquidation. While 4,000 workers at a single plant was large even by historical standards for the southern textile industry, Cannon Mills' Kannapolis workforce had topped 16,000 as recently as the 1970s. Cannon Mills' complex in Kannapolis was perhaps the southern textile industry's closest analogue to the gargantuan factories commonly associated with industries such as automotive manufacturing. Even with just one-quarter of its 1970s-era workforce, the 2003 shutdown was the largest single-day permanent layoff by any employer in North Carolina history. Vanderburg, *Cannon Mills and Kannapolis*, 206.

Gannaway's 30-minute speech: "He choked up once. His voice cracked as he talked about how difficult the day was for the entire Pillowtex family. He paused to regain composure. He said he wanted everybody treated with dignity and respect. He took a few questions: There would be no severance; liquidators would sell everything, including the Cannon brand that no longer could save the company." Reflecting on the sordid drama one year later, Gannaway, who received a $300,000 payout for remaining at the helm of the sinking ship for the duration of its liquidation, told the *Observer* that as he prepared his remarks, he "thought of the 7,650 workers who counted on a Pillowtex paycheck. He thought of James Cannon, the cotton buyer who founded Cannon Mills in 1887. He thought of the generations of workers who, like him, were part of the company's history." By historicizing the moment, Gannaway explained, "It went from being an intellectual exercise to becoming a reality. … It was one of those moments where you go, 'Holy Christ! This is a big deal!'"

Students of southern history since the Civil War are well-versed in how the southern textile industry came to be a big deal. As the opening line of the landmark study, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (1987), put it: "Textile mills built the New South."[17] The textile industry may not have been at the vanguard of the "Bulldozer Revolution," a term C. Vann Woodward coined in 1958 to describe the wave of post-World War II changes sweeping through the southern political economy, but neither was it assumed to be among what Woodward called "the old monuments of regional distinctiveness that are now disappearing."[18] It was not widespread southern prosperity that rendered southern textile

[17] Hall et al., *Like a Family*, xvii. The New South was at least as much an idea (and a deeply racialized one at that) as it was an economic reality. For a still-vital discussion of the term, see Woodward, *Origins*, ix-xi.

[18] C. Vann Woodward, "The Search for Southern Identity," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 34, no. 3 (1958): 322, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26442612.

manufacturing uncompetitive – the southern textile industry had coexisted for decades with an emergent southern growth machine precisely because the uneven nature of southern growth since World War II generally did not threaten southern textile firms' comparative advantage as employers of cheap labor in semi-rural areas.[19] The culprit was the very phenomenon that had enabled the United States South to supplant New England as the primary producer of textile products for the United States market over the course of the twentieth century: capital mobility.[20]

Only when it became clear that the southern textile industry was beyond saving did idled mills that earlier generations of southern elites had insisted were the living embodiment of southern salvation become pivotal but bygone chapters in the story of the South's journey "From Cotton Fields to Skyscrapers," to borrow a phrase from the flagship exhibit of the Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte.[21] The textile industry's new role in the

[19] On the uneven nature of southern development in the so-called Sunbelt since World War II, see Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp. 174-205.

[20] English, *Common Thread*, 179-82. Capital mobility does not only refer to firms choosing to relocate production to low-wage regions (when the investment takes place across national borders, it is known as "foreign direct investment"). Most southern textile firms were not well positioned to engage in foreign direct investment, but even though the capitalists who own factories in Bangladesh are generally not the same capitalists who owned factories in the United States South, capital mobility is nonetheless occurring at a macro level. Illustrating the point, the firm hired to liquidate Pillowtex's assets as part of its bankruptcy sold the machinery in the downtown Kannapolis to Asian textile manufacturers and used the proceeds to pay off the firm's creditors. See Minchin,"Closure of Pillowtex," 289.

[21] "From Cotton Mills to Skyscrapers," Exhibits, Levine Museum of the New South, accessed August 21, 2019, https://www.museumofthenewsouth.org/exhibits. The Levine Museum of the New South opened in its present form in uptown Charlotte in 2001. It is named for the Levine family thanks to a gift from Leon Levine, owner of the discount retailer, Family Dollar. The museum has employed several academic historians over the years, including Thomas Hanchett, author of the well-regarded study: Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

Despite its efforts to direct the public's attention to the reality of racial and other violently-enforced forms of exclusion and discrimination, the Levine Museum of the New South tends to view persistent racism and socioeconomic inequality as an unfortunate divergences from the promise of a New South

narrative of southern growth made generations of mill men and workers worthy of honor, but not of a place in the shining Sunbelt South to which their industry had supposedly given rise.[22] "If you were putting up a monument to industry in the Charlotte region," wrote the *Charlotte Observer* one day after the Pillowtex shutdown, "it wouldn't be a bank vault. Or even a stock car. It'd be a loom."[23]

Left out of the commentary was that Cannon Mills had put up a monument to the textile industry some thirty years earlier in the form of the Cannon Visitor Center. The Visitor Center project emerged in the aftermath of an event that, not unlike the company's shutdown, produced a widespread feeling of breakage with the past: the death of the company's longtime leader, Charles Cannon, in 1971. Charles Cannon's handpicked successor, Don Holt, had the daunting distinction of becoming the first non-Cannon to run Cannon Mills in the firm's 84-year history. Although his claim to the Cannon Mills throne was unquestioned, Holt understood the necessity of communicating to publics within and beyond Kannapolis that the company and its paternalistic social order were very much alive, happily coexistent with a history of managed innovation, and still integral to the southern character of a changing South. It was not to narrate a transition away from a fading past but to project the company's continuing vitality amid a time of significant changes that Don Holt

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ideal which has succeeded in transforming the region from cotton fields to skyscrapers. The museum's mission statement reads: "We connect the past to the future to realize the promises of a New South."

[22] Historian Leon Fink argued that the multifaceted textile heritage movement/industry has many of the trappings of the Lost Cause narrative that coexisted with the rise of the New South in the last decades of the nineteenth century. He recounted his encounter with a large textile heritage group in Leon Fink, "When Community Comes Homes to Roost: The Southern Milltown as Lost Cause," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 1 (2006), http://www.jstor.org/stable/4491858.

[23] Don Hudson, "Our Region's Backbone Is Now Broken," *Charlotte Observer*, July 31, 2003, NewsBank.

and the firm's other top executives embarked on a public relations project that would culminate in the 1974 opening of the Cannon Visitor Center.

The Visitor Center was part of what was arguably Holt's signature initiative during his three-and-a-half-year tenure at the head of the company: implementing a professionalized and modern public relations program.[24] The plant tour and the museum elements of the Visitor Center were vehicles for narrating a new relational structure between the company and its publics, one in which consumer-citizens had some responsibility to ensure Cannon Mills' continuing ability to provide for its workers. Don Holt and his public relations directors envisioned the Visitor Center as part of a "full public relations program designed to communicate with all publics," but Cannon Mills already had relationships with the publics with which it sought to communicate.[25] The company related to workers (especially white workers) through a history of paternalism, with southern political elites through a history of boosterism and lobbying, and with consumers through decades of advertisements and branded products. The new public relations program did not seek to substantially revise any of these relationships. Instead, Holt and his public relations staff sought to create a narrative through which these disparate groups could relate to each other through Cannon Mills.

This thesis looks critically at how Cannon Mills narrated a variety of relationships—social, economic, geographic, and historical—and how the Visitor Center's depiction of these

[24] In 1964, Charles Cannon handed over the position of President to Holt, his longtime protégé, but retained the title of Chairman. Although Cannon did somewhat distance himself from the firm's daily operations, Holt could not unilaterally institute major new initiatives until inheriting the company's chairmanship upon Charles Cannon's death. Charles Cannon was a longtime proponent of professionalized public relations at the industry level–he served as President of the Textile Committee on Public Relations in the early 1950s and was actively involved subsequent industrywide anti-import campaigns–but insisted that his company's firm-level public relations be mediated through his personality, not the dictates of a profession.

[25] John Harden, "Cannon Mills History," *Cannon News*, January 2, 1972, 3.

relationships differed from Cannon Mills' earlier approaches to advertising and public relations. These earlier approaches are the subject of Chapter Two. The New South narrative in its classical form glorified masculinity, whiteness, and production, making it a less-than-ideal theme for national advertising campaigns that targeted and depicted white so-called "housewives."[26] While vital to legitimating the industry's growing power within the region, the New South went unmentioned in the company's consumer advertising between the 1920s and 1960s. The Visitor Center represented a shift away from an advertising strategy that deliberately obscured the linkages between the company's idealized consumer, described in a 1954 memo as comprising, "all women with buying power everywhere in the United States, since we have universal distribution and all such families use towels," and that of Cannon's low-wage, southern, substantially female workforce.[27] Only when the increasing power of retailers to access imports from even lower-wage regions began to threaten Cannon Mills' vertically-integrated, branded production model did the company begin to embed the value of its history and social order into its products.[28]

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[26] Femininity and blackness (and otherness in general) were omnipresent in the New South narrative, but as things to be controlled and managed. See Dolores Janiewski, "Southern Honor, Southern Dishonor: Managerial Ideology and the Construction of Gender, Race, and Class Relations in Southern Industry," in *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, ed. Ava Baron (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). The New South narrative venerated production and producers. While there was a general acknowledgement that increasing production would enable higher standards of living, it was the production that was to be glorified, not the consumption. Scholars have usefully uncovered a rich history of black consumerism in the Jim Crow South, but the relationship between New South ideology and consumerism has received scant attention.

[27] George Frost to Charles Cannon, September 15, box 13, folder 2, Cannon Mills Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC (hereafter cited as Cannon Mills Collection).

[28] On the historical and ideological causes and implications of the rising power of retailers relative to manufacturers since the 1970s, see Nelson Lichtenstein, "The Return of Merchant Capitalism," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 81 (2012), https://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0147547912000087.

Producing public relations required organizing labor in the service of displaying labor. The company quickly found, as Chapter Three demonstrates, that the positionality and identities of those charged with undertaking the labor of display significantly affected the public relations it produced. Cannon Mills' first public factory tours began in July 1971 and were led by its all-male contingent of engineers and plant superintendents, whose technical knowledge of plant operations did not compensate for their inability to illustrate how the clanging machines and the workers who attended them served the needs of the company's housewife consumer. Cannon Mills did not simply evolve away from its initial approach. Rather than attempting to feminize its male managers in order to produce the desired relationship with the public, the company employed (semi-)professionalized, feminized laborers on a part-time basis. Drawn primarily from the ranks of the wives of Cannon Mills management class and supplemented by young female white-collar workers, the company's "thirteen attractive female tour guides" wore colorful costumes made from terry fabric, all part of the company's effort to provide for visitors "a better understanding of the value of the American textile industry."[29]

Cannon Mills' executives experienced still greater struggles in their attempt to narrate the company's past. The same month that the company began offering manager-guided plant tours (July 1971), Cannon Mills opened a small museum in the basement of its downtown Kannapolis headquarters. As with the early iteration of the public factory tours, the company largely relied on in-house labor, and as with the manager-led plant tours, the results failed to satisfy Don Holt's vision. Designed primarily by the marketing department and arranged by the company's staff interior designer, the museum strongly resembled a showroom. Rather

[29] Edward Rankin, "13 Tour Guides Begin Duties," *Cannon News*, July 24, 1972, 1.

than attempting to construct a holistic narrative that united customers, management, workers, and town, the basement museum displayed the company's history through a progression of towels. Company founder James Cannon's desk loomed in the background of the display, juxtaposing the firm's efforts to drive innovation in household textiles with a static, paternalistic management structure. Cannon Mills sought the expertise of a museum consultant, Raymond Pisney, to help craft a coherent historical narrative in which producer and product progressed in lockstep, and to display that narrative using storytelling techniques appropriate to the museum medium.

As Chapter Four reveals, hiring a professional exposed more of Cannon Mills' problems than it solved. One might imagine that a professional historian would clash with management over the historian's reluctance to toe the company line and produce a narrative sanitized of historical conflicts within and across intersecting hierarchies of class, race, and gender. Instead, the company's marketing department found Pisney to be, if anything, overly attached to a New South narrative in which Cannon Mills served as a benevolent agent of regional improvement. Pisney sought to portray the "essential relationship between the founding and growth of the enterprise in 'The New South' period with that of the present position of the Company," and expressed his belief in using "The Museum as a Tool to Develop Man's Future."[30] By the 1970s, the textile industry's increasingly peripheral place within the southern political economy posed a challenge to its centrality to the southern growth narrative. So too, however, did a wave of labor activism at Cannon Mills and other

[30] Raymond F. Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline for the Cannon Visitor Center," January 30, 1973, Cannon Mills Looks to the Future, 1. Executive Office Files, box 65, folder 4, Cannon Mills Collection. "Cannon Mills Looks to the Future" is the exhibit title in which the text appeared. With the exception of the introduction, the pagination scheme of Pisney's document begins at 1 for each section.

southern textile firms during the early 1970s led by black workers whose exclusion from most jobs in southern textile mills and apparel factories had ended only in the mid-1960s.[31] Pisney's narrative was not only under threat from conflicts emanating from within Kannapolis. Cannon Mills' New York-based marketing department saw Pisney's Kannapolis-centric exhibition as suggesting a paternalistic attitude toward consumers that was out of step in a world in which fashion meant providing an array of choices attuned to the rapidly shifting consumer demands of the moment.

Pisney submitted his proposed exhibits storyline to the company on January 30, 1973, and by the time the Visitor Center opened the following October, it had undergone an almost complete redesign as the marketing department reasserted control over the public relations department. Cannon Mills incorporated some of Pisney's expertise, especially regarding exhibit design techniques, but dispensed with his totalizing narrative in favor of a loosely connected series of showrooms. As Chapter Five demonstrates, however, there can be no final word on the meaning of Cannon Mills and Kannapolis. The legacy of the bygone company and its workers remains a point of contestation amid Kannapolis's supposed postindustrial transformation.

The story of the development of the Cannon Visitor Center during the 1970s sheds light on another "essential relationship": the relationship between the industrial heritage sites that have proliferated in the post-1970s "postindustrial" context and the longer genealogy of industrial tourism and industrial museums. The Cannon Visitor Center was neither an attempt

[31] As many black textile workers well understood, segregation in the textile industry did not give way to inevitable New South progress. It had to be driven out through federal legislation and enforcement (most notably Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) which came only under pressure from social movements. The historiography of race and the southern textile industry is addressed in Chapter Two (esp. 39-43).

to legitimate the rise of an industrial social order nor to reclaim a past lost to deindustrialization. At a time when textile industry executives fully understood the need for further protectionism, the Visitor Center projected a future—to its workers and its publics—in which the events of July 30, 2003 could, should, and would be avoided.[32]

Historicizing Industrial Heritage

Industrial heritage forms but one part of a universe of cultural heritage. The expansion of that universe has only seemed to accelerate since 1996, the year historian David Lowenthal declared the existence of a "heritage glut."[33] Although not all manifestations of the cultural heritage movement/industry explicitly invoke industrial pasts, the emergence of what we now know as cultural heritage occurred amid what geographer David Harvey described as "a sea-change in cultural as well as in political economic practices" during the economic and political turmoil of the 1970s.[34] In the United States, a prevailing sense of decay animated the desire of many Americans, particularly so-called white-ethnics, to mediate through the hard work of their oppressed ancestors their permanent claim to a seemingly shrinking American bounty. During the last decades of the twentieth century, wrote Historian Matthew Frye Jacobson, "The question 'Whose country?' assumed much of the urgency surrounding the question of just what, exactly, the country was to become; the

[32] On the textile and apparel industries' lobbying efforts on behalf of tariffs and import quotas, which began in earnest in the aftermath of World War II, see Minchin, *Empty Mills*, 55-59.

[33] David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 1.

[34] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989), vii.

ethnocentric lament 'Why can't they be like us?' tapped the unsettling power of the question 'Why can't we be like we once were?'"[35]

If all forms of cultural heritage seek to repair frayed connections to the past (even if, in practice, repairing connections means consecrating new ones), the legacy of deindustrialization and uneven development since the crises of the 1970s has ensured that industrial pasts remain haunting presences in supposedly postindustrial places. Literary scholar Sherry Lee Linkon argued that for working-class communities most acutely impacted by the loss of industrial jobs and the socioeconomic stability those jobs provided across multiple generations, "deindustrialization is not an event of the past. It remains an active and significant part of the present. Like toxic waste, the persistent and dangerous residue from the production of nuclear power and weapons, deindustrialization has a half-life."[36] It is hardly surprising, then, that since its emergence in the 1970s, industrial heritage has constituted what historian Michael Frisch called "contested memorial terrain."[37] In struggles over the fates of industrialized landscapes, Frisch argued, "it is not simply the meanings and memory that have been contested. It is, quite literally, policy and politics for the present and future."[38] Even as memories of pre-postindustrialization fade, industrial heritage remains at the center of the postindustrial narratives advanced by growth coalitions across the Global North. As historians Stefan Berger and Steven High noted in 2019, "increasingly, industrial heritage is

[35] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[36] Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Working-Class Writing About Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 314.

[37] Michael Frisch, "De-, Re-, and Post-Industrialization: Industrial Heritage as Contested Memorial Terrain," *Journal of Folklore Research* 35, no. 3 (1998): 241, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814656.

[38] Ibid.

caught up in wider culture-led redevelopment schemes tied to gentrification, which often have a detrimental effect on the very communities that once worked at these sites."[39]

Rather than a socially produced common to be used, the culture-led-redevelopment ethos imagines industrial heritage and other varieties of cultural heritage as resources from which exchange value can be extracted. The title of a 2014 monograph, *Harnessing Place Branding through Cultural Entrepreneurship,* for example, imbued cultural heritage with the power to do work, just waiting to be subjected to the control of capital, transformed from its inefficient state, and put to its most profitable use.[40] Only when imagined as a resource can other uses for a real or abstract object come to appear wasteful by comparison.[41] Although the value of cultural heritage is its supposed authenticity and its imagined proximity to a meaningful history, too much authenticity complicates efforts to harness it. Inadvertently

[39] Stefan Berger and Steven High, "(De-)Industrial Heritage: An Introduction," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History* 16, no. 1 (2019), https://dx.doi.org/10.1215/15476715-7269281.

[40] Frank M. Go, Ulla Hakala, and Arja Lemmetyinen, *Harnessing Place Branding through Cultural Entrepreneurship* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[41] Political scientist Cara New Daggett noted that the emergent field of energy humanities "asks how and why communities become attached to fossil fuels." One could ask the same question of cultural heritage. Daggett noted in her genealogy of energy that prior to the "discovery" of energy in the 1840s by British scientists who inaugurated the field of thermodynamics, the term "energy" did not refer to fuel. Although fossil fuel consumption was already increasing at the moment of energy's "discovery," Daggett argued that the "birth of energy" was not the result of increasing fuel consumption. Energy was born with the solidification of epistemologies of energy that enabled "the emergence of energy as an object of modern politics." She added that "Since the nineteenth century, human relationship to fuel has been governed by [a] singular ruling logic of energy, which justifies the indexing of human well-being according to the idealization of work and an unquestioned drive to put the Earth's materials to use for profit." Just as all human societies and cultures required a relationship to fuel prior to the emergence of a dominant logic of how fuel ought to be governed, the same is true of the human past and its material and ideological artifacts. The discourse of the cultural heritage industry must be understood as a governing logic. Like the energopolitics Daggett described, the cultural heritage industry is concerned with how to most efficiently put resources to work for the narrow purpose of "development" as defined by capital. Cara New Daggett, *The Birth of Energy: Fossil Fuels, Thermodynamics, and the Politics of Work* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 3-4.

lending credence to Linkon's "half-lives of deindustrialization" thesis, the authors of *Harnessing Place Branding through Cultural Entrepreneurship* wrote:

> Old industrial towns and cities are also rather peculiar from an institutional perspective. Both their formal and informal institutional characteristics differentiate them substantially from other types of territories. The dominance of large enterprises creates a culture of dependency and weakens entrepreneurial activity. This is connected with the lack of an innovative milieu and certain inertia of deeply embedded habits, particularly among industrial workers. On the other hand, positive features include a higher level of solidarity, responsibility, and technical and organizational discipline derived from hard work. Put succinctly, a peculiar culture is typical for these kinds of areas, and there is neither room nor interest in scenarios including any reference to cultural entrepreneurship.[42]

What the authors called "cultural entrepreneurship," anthropologist Cathy Stanton more aptly described in a 2019 article as "heritage labor," which she defined as "labor devoted to preserving and interpreting 'obsolete' forms and spaces of labor within transformed or transforming economies."[43] Stanton was not the first scholar to recognize the work of human actors in producing postindustrial imaginaries. Historian Tracy Neuman has described postindustrialism as the product of "a new chapter in a long history of idea sharing

[42] Go, Hakala, and Lemmetyinen, *Harnessing Place Branding through Cultural Entrepreneurship*, 192.

[43] Cathy Stanton, "Displaying the Industrial: Toward a Genealogy of Heritage Labor," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History* 16, no. 1 (2019): 151, https://dx.doi.org/10.1215/15476715-7269374.

among municipal officials and city planners in the North Atlantic region."[44] However, where Neuman traced the elite networks of "boosters, social reformers and policymakers" who developed "institutions and frameworks that facilitated the exchange of urban planning and policy ideas," Stanton emphasized that "cultural workers have served crucial functions by explaining and helping people—sometimes including themselves—to adapt to the ongoing volatility of industrialism and capitalism, often from class positions that exemplify the uncertainties of emergent and contingent professions or statuses."[45]

Industrial heritage is made from the particular kind of waste created in production known as a byproduct.[46] Indeed, much of the material culture of the industrial heritage industry is repurposed industrial byproducts given new life through the input of heritage labor. The phenomenon is particularly acute in the Appalachian coal industry: "The way Carol Dameron sees it," reported the *State Journal* of Charleston, West Virginia in 2017, "every time someone buys one of her handcrafted necklaces, they're buying a piece of history."[47] Dameron's necklaces incorporated coal and coal company scrip, "the currency of coal towns," explained the *State Journal*, adding (with no reference to coal companies' well-known use of scrip to drive down wages and limit worker mobility) that "rather than pay

[44] Tracy Neumann, *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 15.

[45] Ibid., 15-16; Stanton,"Displaying the Industrial: Toward a Genealogy of Heritage Labor," 152.

[46] Cara New Daggett found ideas about what to make of work and waste to be animating features of energopolitics: "A dominant energy logic of work and waste helped to naturalize industrialization, but also its pollution …. Energy also naturalized the imperial circulation of power, which sacrificed people and things to the project of work, just as coal was sacrificed to the engine." Daggett, *Birth of Energy*, 159-60.

[47] Linda Harris, "Second Life," *State Journal* (Charleston, WV), March 13, 2017, EBSCOhost.

cash, coal companies would give their workers scrip they could spend in the company store for whatever they needed."[48]

Coal heritage in Appalachia has not simply been an organic expression of nostalgia for a bygone past on the part of people left behind by capital. Industry-funded, tourist-oriented museums such as the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine represent "coal heritage when coal history is still being made," argued sociologist Rebecca Scott in her monograph *Removing Mountains: Extracting Nature and Identity in the Appalachian Coalfields* (2010).[49] Similarly, the Cannon Visitor Center in the 1970s was creating textile heritage before the end of southern textile history. Scott noted that underground mining, not the still more environmentally destructive practice of mountaintop removal that largely supplanted it, was "the unmarked subject of 'Coal Heritage.'"[50] Miners' bygone struggles (with the danger of the job, not collective action against coal operators) subtly justified the supposed technological progress represented by mountaintop removal. At the same time,

> [Coal heritage] creates a sentimental story of coal company towns as spaces apart, where a simple work ethic and class structure determined everything completely, as opposed to the complex world of the modern coalfields, where even white women (must) work outside the home, the state is a bigger employer than the coal industry, and coal mining itself frequently looks more

[48] Ibid.

[49] Rebecca R. Scott, *Removing Mountains: Extracting Nature and Identity in the Appalachian Coalfields* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 148.

[50] Ibid.

like construction or road work than the iconic image of the underground mine.[51]

As Scott's work demonstrated, to assume that industrial heritage has an exclusively postindustrial character is to ignore its role in perpetuating the dominance of the very industry and its attendant social structures that it claims to be memorializing. Scott relied on ethnographic rather than historical methodology, however, and while she historicized many of the tropes pervading industry-funded coal heritage sites relating to masculinity, sacrifice, progress, and Appalachia's place in American nationalism, she did not historicize the development of coal heritage as a cultural form. Despite Appalachia's reputation for backwardness, state officials in West Virginia were innovators in the rise of what we would now call industrial heritage-based redevelopment. A 1962 article in the *New York Times* reported that the "the coming of the big gnawing and crawling machines that dig out the coal underground has resulted in high unemployment and left many once-prosperous coal towns withering in valleys and on hillsides," but presented the opportunity to turn "adversity into assets."[52] The Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine, where Scott conducted ethnographic fieldwork for her monograph, was among the several state and/or company-funded tourist attractions that opened in the early 1960s, all of which aimed to make coal an unextractable part of the West Virginia identity for insiders and outsiders alike. "Until a few years ago," wrote the *Times*, "few people envisioned coal as anything but an energy fuel. There was little romance in its production."[53]

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[51] Ibid., 154.

[52] George Lawless, "Viewing Coal Mines' Less Seamy Side," *New York Times*, April 8, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[53] Ibid.

The inescapable presence of coal and its byproducts—in the air, on skin, in lungs, in streams—was a fact of life in coal towns, but the material culture of coal crafts suggests that miners and their families viewed coal with a reverence approaching that typically reserved for deities. Justin Fairchild of Black Gold Coal Crafts explained that "with people in West Virginia, there's a true relationship to coal — they relate to coal more so than people from other states, even other mining states."[54] The connection of *coal* (as opposed to the coal town, the coal mine, or the coal miner's union) and identity within West Virginia has been a conscious project of coal operators and state tourist officials, and while the subject demands additional research, the prison seems to have played a significant role in organizing the heritage labor that launched the coal craft industry. The *New York Times* reported in 1962 that "coal jewelry was started several years ago as a rehabilitation project at the State Women's Prison in Alderson. The inexpensive items proved so popular to souvenir hunters that state rehabilitation officers have initiated retraining projects throughout the area to teach native workers to hand craft the jewelry."[55]

Although the Cannon Visitor Center was a response to a possible deindustrialized future, it was also part of the tradition of opening the factory to display progress. Historian Joshua Freeman noted in his 2018 transnational history of the factory that from the earliest days of textile mills in mid-eighteenth-century England, "contemporary observers had no doubt that the cotton mill and the changes it wrought represented a technical, economic, and social break from the past. From the late eighteenth century on, factories, factory villages, and manufacturing cities drew tourists, journalists, and philanthropists from continental

[54] Harris, "Second Life."

[55] Lawless, "Viewing Coal Mines' Less Seamy Side."

Europe and North America as well as Great Britain itself."[56] By the middle of the nineteenth century, industrial spaces were not simply curiosities for well-off travelers, but had begun to target a mass audience. They featured prominently in multinational exhibitions and World's Fairs during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. As historian Allison Marsh found, with the rise of modern branded manufacturing corporations and the corporate public relations function during the last decade of the nineteenth century, factory tours and industrial museums became more commonplace in the United States outside of these special occasions.[57] Tours and museums established origin stories for thoroughly new types of organizations and the men whose personalities often stood at their center. In doing so, the public factory tour and industrial museum engrained modern industry into American landscapes and American nationalism. Charles Richards, president of the American Association of Museums, evangelized on the industrial museum's behalf in 1925:

> We are today one of the foremost industrial countries of the world. Can we afford to omit from our educational program the story of what has made us? We have developed a high type of industrial organization and as a people we are the first to utilize the fruits of new inventions. Shall we leave other nations to grow wise through their study of our achievements and ourselves neglect their meaning and their inspiration? To tell the story adequately we need the industrial museum.[58]

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[56] Joshua B. Freeman, *Behemoth: A History of the Factory and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018), 20.

[57] Allison C. Marsh, "Greetings from the Factory Floor: Industrial Tourism and the Picture Postcard," 51, no. 4 (2008): 378, https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.2008.tb00324.x.

[58] Charles Richards, *The Industrial Museum* (New York: MacMillan, 1925), 48.

Even at its most millenarian, the discourse of industrial history spoke of its subject in terms of a resource to be put to use for the nation or for an individual firm. Public historians Stephen H. Cutcliffe and Steven Lubar, however, suggested that deindustrialization had rendered the bygone industrial museum of a different species from its emerging postindustrial counterpart. They pointed to Richards's statement as evidence that, despite widespread concern among the American public over "issues ranging from monopolies to child labor to the desirability of unions, these issues were simply not addressed in industrial museums. Rather, industrial museums had a clear role in the advertising arsenal of business enterprises."[59] Cutcliffe and Lubar expressed their hope that in a less celebratory postindustrial context, public historians steeped in the new social history's more egalitarian approach to the past could be an asset to culture-based redevelopment projects by helping visitors "to understand where we as a nation have come from, get some perspective on the transitions that we are undergoing as individuals, communities, and as a nation, and consider the future of work, technology, and society."[60]

Like Cutcliffe and Lubar, historian Mike Wallace suggested that the industrial heritage museums which began to emerge with the onset of deindustrialization in the 1970s and 1980s represented at least the promise of transcending the industrial museum's propagandistic misuse of the past. Wallace observed in a 1987 article that over the course of the past ten years, "The focus of attention has shifted from industrial objects, processes, and entrepreneurs to the universe of the working class."[61] He noted with approval that "in North

[59] Stephen H. Cutcliffe and Steven Lubar, "The Challenge of Industrial History Museums," *The Public Historian* 22, no. 3 (2000): 12, https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3379575.

[60] Ibid., 12-13.

[61] Mike Wallace, "Industrial Museums and the History of Deindustrialization," *The Public Historian* 9, no. 1 (1987): 9, https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3377102.

Carolina, many public historians now tell the story of the region's mill towns largely from the point of view of the workers," adding that in Massachusetts, "Lowell's National Historical Park chronicles the world of labor from the mill girls through the ethnic workers of the twentieth century."[62] Wallace credited what he considered to be the long-overdue attentiveness to working-class life and class conflict in museums and public history sites to "the efforts and struggles and the courage of public historians," adding that "I think it is a splendid development."[63]

More recent scholarly accounts of industrial heritage such as anthropologist Cathy Stanton's 2006 monograph, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City*, have sought to understand public historians and other heritage workers as social actors who are subject to the very social and economic forces that have produced "the imbalances and volatility found in postindustrial places."[64] Stanton's findings complicated Wallace's rosier assumptions about professional public historians' ability to infuse industrial heritage museums with unsettling historical perspectives. Stanton argued that despite maintaining a professional staff comprised predominantly of university-trained public historians with progressive or left-wing political sympathies, "the questioning, leftist rhetoric of much of the Lowell National Historical Park's (NHP) interpretation does not seem to make significant inroads on the 'models and metaphors' that visitors bring with them to the park."[65] The Lowell NHP provided what Stanton termed a "liminal performative space" in which to

[62] Ibid., 10.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 132.

[65] Ibid., 171.

engage with a transcended industrial past. Talk of collective struggle against the boss did little, argued Stanton, to challenge most middle-class visitors' assumption "that economic and social change in the modern world has consisted of a linear, three-part, evolutionary progress from agricultural to industrial to postindustrial, with each successive phase producing a higher standard of living than the previous one."[66]

The rise of heritage discourse in museums during the 1970s, as historian M. J. Rymsza-Pawlowska argued in *History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s* (2017), "reflected new perceptions of the past in proximity to, or informing, the present, as curators arranged historical objects to encourage immersive experiences that conveyed the feeling of the historical. Rather than viewing the historical at a distance, Americans increasingly sought to place themselves *within* the past."[67] Given that the 1970s also witnessed what historian Jefferson Cowie called "the last days of the working class" as a semi-autonomous political and cultural force, it is hardly surprising that even relatively progressive museums such as the Lowell NHP have seldom asked visitors to place themselves based on their class identity.[68] As Stanton noted, the "ritual of reconnection" at Lowell NHP provided for middle-class visitors "a means of reconnecting with lost working-class, ethnic, or immigrant forebears," enabling them to return "to their everyday lives reassured that society is advancing as it should, and that their forebears' sacrifices and hard

[66] Ibid., 172.

[67] M. J. Rymsza-Pawlowska, *History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 117. Emphasis hers.

[68] Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010), 362. Cowie noted that "women, immigrants, minorities, and, yes, white guys, all make up the 'new working class' that succeeded that of basic industry, but there is no discursive, political place for them comparable to the classic concept of the industrial working class."

work were not in vain. Those sacrifices produced our present prosperity, and they are now suitably memorialized and valorized at a national park."[69]

One of the few works to examine how a longstanding industrial museum has navigated the economic reality of deindustrialization and the rise of postindustrial ideology is historian Jesse Swigger's *'History Is Bunk': Assembling the Past at Henry Ford's Greenfield Village* (2014).[70] Swigger traced the making and remaking of Henry Ford's Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, the largest industrial museum in the United States and one of the oldest in continuous operation. She found that the version of American history that Henry Ford laid out in 1929 did not demand blind acceptance of industrialism as progress, but instead brought into physical coexistence the material culture of the fading rural past of Ford's youth and the great American inventors whose innovations had contributed to the unmaking of that idealized vision of America. As Swigger noted, "the landscape embodied his complicated and at times contradictory worldview. By 1947 [the year of Henry Ford's death], the village articulated Ford's beliefs and values concerning the small town, education, the ideal relationship between business owners and their employees, and self-made manhood."[71] Ironically, Henry Ford, a xenophobic industrialist who believed that "history is bunk," often left more to what social historians call "the interpretive authority of ordinary people" (in this case, visitors) than did the subsequent generations of museum professionals tasked with packaging aspects of Ford's worldview alongside a more inclusive telling of the

[69] Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment*, 172.

[70] Jessie Swigger, *'History Is Bunk': Assembling the Past at Henry Ford's Greenfield Village* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014).

[71] Ibid., 12.

past into consumable experiences worthy of customers' precious disposable income and leisure time.[72]

When Henry Ford embarked on his Greenfield Village project in the 1920s, he saw something of an "urban crisis" taking place from the massive concentration of manufacturing plants in Detroit, but it was the adverse effects of workers' lack of access to the American countryside that troubled Ford.[73] By the 1990s, as historian Thomas Sugrue described, the effects of deindustrialization in Detroit were such that "prairie grass and flocks of pheasants have reclaimed what was, only fifty years ago, the most densely populated section of the city."[74] Swigger argued that "while Detroit and Dearborn were strong points of departure for conversations about racial, economic, and social power structures, Greenfield Village transported visitors away from the local present and past into an imaginary small town."[75] By contrast, although Cannon Mills' executives imagined away a not-so-distant past of overt racial and gender-based employment discrimination, the Cannon Visitor Center attempted to impart that Kannapolis's history and the ongoing presence of Cannon Mills made it a very real place.

In *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (1999), which remains a template for studying the process of industrialization and deindustrialization within local and transnational historical contexts, historian Jefferson Cowie perceptively observed that

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[72] Hall et al., *Like a Family*, xix.

[73] Ford's belief about engineering cities to fit the demands of the factory without depriving workers of easy access to the morally rejuvenating countryside is discussed in Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia : The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009).

[74] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Rev ed. (Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.

[75] Swigger, *History Is Bunk*, 168.

"the closure of any plant is of political and social concern, but the final shutdown of a factory–the act that draws the public's attention–usually comes only at the end of a long, silent process of job relocation."[76] In Kannapolis, decline was not silent, but narrated and curated by Cannon Mills in an attempt to influence workers, consumers, and citizens. The Cannon Mills case does not have a direct corollary in every industrial heritage expression in the widely varied and highly contested universe of industrial heritage. Our understanding of struggles to use industrial pasts in the service of imagining and coping with life and work in postindustrial presents and futures demands greater attention to the efforts to use the past to imagine a future that retained a real and honored place for industrial work and industrial workers.[77] To put it more succinctly, heritages have histories. As the author of a *Charlotte Observer* profile of the Cannon Visitor Center explained, "it isn't fair to look at the day-to-day modern world with an eye for what will seem interesting a century from now. But Kannapolis, surely, is worth preserving because of what it says about today. If the mill houses are not changed too much and the unique story of James W. Cannon is preserved, Kannapolis, like Old Salem, will remain remarkable."[78]

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[76] Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 6.

[77] As historians Stefan Berger and Steven High wrote in a 2019 introduction to a special issue of the journal *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* devoted to "(de)industrial heritage," "The centrality of [traditionally masculine] industries to local, regional, and national identities was thrown into question with major mine, mill, and factory closures. The new 'postindustrial' economy valued other people and other places …. A social structure built up over generations was torn asunder." See Berger and High,"(De-)Industrial Heritage: An Introduction," 8.

[78] Mary Kratt, "The Story of James Cannon's Town," *Charlotte Observer*, December 14, 1979, NewsBank North Carolina. Old Salem is a public history site in Winston-Salem, NC. In operation since 1950, Old Salem celebrates the Moravian settlement of Salem, which was founded in 1766. "Moravian Research," Old Salem Museums & Gardens, accessed April 11, 2020, https://www.oldsalem.org/scholarship-research/moravian-research/.

Chapter Two

"To answer these questions, we must look into history"

On April 4, 1971, "the great and the ordinary," in the Kannapolis *Daily Independent*'s words, gathered at the First Presbyterian Church of Concord for Charles Cannon's funeral.[1] Several newspapers reported that Cannon's passing heralded "the end of an era," with the *Charlotte Observer* remarking, "His death leaves a void in Kannapolis, a gap among textile leaders, and an ache in the hearts of that family of men, women and children that he loved and provided for."[2] Congregants sang hymns about structure, guidance, and fatherhood, including "I Need Thee Every Day," "Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me," "Gloria Patri," and "How Firm a Foundation."[3] The Reverend Dr. Charles Henry, a Cabarrus County native and Duke University Divinity School professor, delivered a eulogy in which he approvingly described Charles Cannon as a Puritan. "The indelible mark of the Puritan," explained Henry, "is that he orders all things under God. Rather than "trying to invent values, the Puritan tries to discover them."[4]

In the traditionalist-versus-modernizer paradigm through which analysts such as sociologist Paul Luebke have studied southern politics, Charles Cannon would surely fall into traditionalist camp. According to Luebke, industries at the periphery of the national economy, including "textile, apparel, and furniture firms, which have traditionally relied on lower levels of capitalization, are typical traditionalists."[5] He characterized traditionalist

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[1] "In Simple Service Final Tribute Paid to Cannon," *Daily Independent*, April 5, 1971, 1.

[2] "Charlie Cannon: Family Man," *Charlotte Observer*, April 5, 1973. NewsBank North Carolina

[3] Ibid.

[4] Charles Henry, "C. A. Cannon: In Memoriam," *Daily Independent*, April 5, 1971, 1.

[5] Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 97.

ideology as "rooted in the Baptist-based culture of North Carolina's small towns and rural areas," and argued that "traditionalists have not opposed economic change but have preferred economic growth that could reinforce the established social order." He cited as an example that "in the early twentieth century … cotton mills with their adjacent mill villages were desirable because they provided workers continuity with the small-scale rural communities from which they had migrated."[6] Modernizers, meanwhile, comprise those connected to capital-intensive core industries such as construction, transportation, healthcare, research, higher education, finance, insurance, and real estate. The ascendant modernizers, argued Luebke, pursue economic expansion with little regard for "social changes that accompany economic growth, such as suburban sprawl, traffic congestion," as people move to the region in search of new economic opportunities.[7]

In viewing the peripheral southern textile industry as a force of unchanging traditionalism in the political economy of North Carolina, however, Luebke largely overlooked the historical process by which the southern textile industry and its most symbolic firms took on new meanings amid a shifting regional, national, and global political economy. The southern textile industry evolved from representing a beacon of New South progress during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, to a massive and deeply entrenched anachronism during the mid-to-late-twentieth century, and finally, to a relic of a bygone era in the twenty-first century. Cannon Mills' turn to what the company described as a "modern approach to public relations" during the 1970s stands as a testament to the textile industry's effort to stake out a permanent place for itself. Executives at Cannon Mills and

[6] Ibid., 98.

[7] Ibid.

other southern textile firms faced with the threat of imports from low-wage countries professed their commitment to the goals of southern modernization, but also called into question the ability of that modernization to bring benefits to those in the southern periphery without help from the traditional social order.

On the Borders of the New South and the Sunbelt

The New South mythology did the symbolic work of making possible an imaginary integration of a peripheral, backward region into a modern nation state. In order for the South to realize its potential, the land and its (white) people would need to be modernized in tandem. As southern historian and New South booster Phillip Alexander Bruce put it, "War and Reconstruction had hurled ruin upon every material resource of the South except the fertility of her soil, which remained as capable as ever of producing the great staple crops; War and Reconstruction had swept away the accumulated wealth of the Southern States in all its varied forms; but there was one thing which not even they, besom-like in character as they were, could destroy, namely, the moral qualities of the people."[8] Bruce, like many New South boosters, emphasized the common ancestry binding millowners and millworkers were to thank for what he characterized as "the prevailing satisfaction" among southern textile workers. In contrast to the large immigrant workforces in New England textile mills, "in all of the principal mills of the South … the pay rolls show only Anglo-Saxon names … these names are identical with those found on the regimental rosters of the Revolutionary, Indian, and Mexican Wars, and the War of Secession."[9]

[8] Phillip Alexander Bruce, *The Rise of the New South* (London: George Barrie & Sons, 1905), 4, Google Books.

[9] Ibid., 186.

Textile industrialists' brand of business progressivism insisted that in leaving the farm for the mill, white textile workers were living embodiments of regional progress. That progress, however, needed to be managed through benevolent paternalism based in shared bonds of a southern, American whiteness. Bruce wrote:

> To this section of the Southern population, an opportunity has now been presented, by the rapid increase in the number of cotton mills, of improving their general condition; a new field has been opened for the poorer classes of the Southern rural districts, and through it, they have the chance of securing all those social and pecuniary benefits that have long been enjoyed by the factory operatives of the North. In the remote and interior regions from which the mill operatives of the South are drawn, there are few schools, few churches, small social advantages, and no really remunerative operations. In all the mill villages, on the other hand, there are excellent schools and churches, numerous social advantages, and employment at fair wages for every day of the week except the seventh.[10]

Even as they portrayed poor white farmers as the objects of their benevolence, New South boosters readily admitted that they were also the region's chief resource.[11] *North Carolina: The Land of Opportunity*, a 1923 pamphlet published by the state, reported, for instance, that a crucial factor "to the future development of cotton mill industries in North Carolina [is] the white farm tenants and their families who are still struggling with the

[10] Ibid., 185

[11] *North Carolina: The Land of Opportunity* (Raleigh, NC: Mitchell Printing Company, State Printers, 1923), 32.

economic hazards and social disadvantages in her country areas."[12] Textile industrialists racialized textile work in opposition to the "crude labor" of smalltime agricultural production. The mill provided "the most indigent class of whites" the means to progress, while those who remained on the farm risked being dragged down to the level of "the negro, [who,] owing to his willingness to accept lower wages and his perfect contentment with the humblest manner of life, is able to compete successfully with the white man."[13]

If the semi-peripherality of the textile town offered white Piedmont farmers liberation from the supposedly decivilizing effects of competition with black farmers, it promised to bring Appalachian whites out of isolation in their decivilizing environment. As historian Henry Shapiro argued, Americans experiencing the transition to industrial modernity became conscious of the otherness of southern Appalachia during the last decades of the nineteenth century, imagining the region as a "strange land" and mountaineers, in spite of their supposedly pure Anglo-Saxon blood, as "a peculiar people."[14] There were several theories of whether the land or the people accounted for the region's otherness, but among textile industrialists, a popular explanation for the region's poverty and social problems was the isolation to which inhabitants of the rugged mountain environment were supposedly subjected. When challenged by Progressive Era reformers over problems endemic to southern textile towns such as poor sanitation and child labor, southern textile industrialists

[12] Ibid., 104-05.

[13] Bruce, *The Rise of the New South*, 12.

[14] Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), x. Shapiro's intellectual history of the idea of Appalachia remains highly influential in the multidisciplinary field of Appalachian Studies. Shapiro argued that the perceived "strangeness" of the Appalachian environment loomed large in national debates over the region's "otherness" and the "peculiar" backwardness of its "pure Anglo-Saxon" people relative to a rapidly industrializing nation that was becoming increasingly multi-ethnic.

often retorted that their perceived abuses of power were necessitated by the problematic environments from which their workers migrated. Textile industrialists urged their critics to consider the challenges inherent in serving such a backward workforce and what would become of them without the discipline of the mill. Thomas R. Dawley, a textile industry spokesman, wrote in a retort to Progressive-Era critics of the southern textile industry's reliance on child labor, "If you leave them in their isolated coves and mountain retreates [sic] until they are … set in their ways with generations of idle habits and lack of thrift behind them, you can do nothing with them in a cotton mill, or any other kind of mill. But if you can get them young enough … you can train them to work, to acquire industrious habits, and become excellent workmen and good citizens."[15]

The textile industry's argument held sway even among many constituencies within and beyond the South who believed that more government regulation might be necessary to push the industry to be an even more progressive force. As historian Natalie Ring observed of the noted southern child labor reformer, Edgar Gardner Murphy, "He saw promise in the industrial advancement made by the New South cotton mills and was willing to concede that 'the factory is to take its place beside the church, the schoolhouse, the home, as one of the effectual and characteristic forces of civilization' in the South."[16] The industry's semi-peripheral place between country and modern civilization proper, in other words, meant that hierarchy and traditionalism were, within limits that needed to be checked from without, necessary means to the end of progress. As resistance mounted from within the southern

[15] Thomas R. Dawley, *The Child that Toileth Not: The Story of a Government Investigation*, (New York: Gracia Publishing Company, 1912), 489-90.

[16] Natalie J. Ring, *Problem South: Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 150.

textile world, however, the textile town's claim to serving as a progressive semi-periphery began to be called into question. More jarring to middle-class conceptions of southern textile mills as forces for managed progress than images of child labor and debased working conditions were the widespread episodes labor activism among southern millworkers during the 1920s and 1930s. Sociologist Jennings Rhyne wrote in his study, *Some Southern Cotton Mill Workers and their Villages* (1930) that in the aftermath of the bloody labor uprisings of 1929, questions on the lips of southern leaders included, "Was the present unrest an indication that the mill worker, a former tenant farmer, attracted to the mill because of the weekly pay envelope and increased earning capacity, was becoming disillusioned, seething with discontent at long hours and low wages with little chance of bettering his condition?"[17]

Rhyne, like several other contributors to sociologist Howard Odum's Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, subscribed to a cautious southern liberalism. His analysis at times cut deep into the narrative framework underlying southern textile paternalism, including his argument that "the humanitarian motive associated with the revival of the cotton industry in the South–the feeling that the cotton mill was built in order to provide a class of unfortunate whites with a means of earning a livelihood–is an unhappy chapter in the history of southern textile manufacturing."[18] Veering at times into the logic of eugenics, Rhyne feared that the traditional hierarchical structures that had taken hold in the southern textile industry, a semi-peripheral place between modernity and backwardness, risked trapping workers in indefinite

[17] Jennings Jefferson Rhyne, *Some Southern Cotton Mill Workers and Their Villages* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), 3.

[18] Ibid., 198.

suspension. While not dismissing the textile industry's role as an agent of regional and national convergence, Rhyne noted:

> The mills have drawn principally upon the lowest social strata of the white population for their labor force. As a result, a vast convergence of undesirable elements has probably taken place. Where formerly the poorer and more ignorant of the tenant farmer element was diffused and scattered among a generous sprinkling of well-to-do families, that element has brought together in the mill village in such a way that little diffusion of outside culture can take place.[19]

Nonetheless, he believed that given the even greater backwardness of the South's most peripheral regions, the textile industry, paternalism and all, remained a progressive force in southern history. "The ignorant and illiterate condition of many of those brought into the mill villages from the farms and their lack of knowledge as to methods of health and sanitation and of correct living habits," after all, was not the fault of their employers.[20] Rhyne acknowledged that the welfare work associated with textile paternalism had brought with it "many harmful results" before conceding that "the time has not yet arrived when welfare work can be entirely suspended by the manufacturers."[21] Rhyne concluded the book by arguing, "it seems safe to infer … that in spite of all of the shiftlessness and lack of ambition on the part of some, the great bulk of the cotton mill population of the state and of the South generally has undergone in recent years marked improvement in all phases of life."[22]

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[19] Ibid., 209.

[20] Ibid., 130.

[21] Ibid., 198.

[22] Ibid., 212.

Foreshadowing developments of the postwar decades, however, Rhyne argued that the public (whether this was a southern public or a national public he did not say) beyond the textile world had an obligation to push modernity into the semi-periphery in the form of "enforcement of the school attendance law and the child labor laws…" as supplements to "sanely administered systems of industrial welfare work."[23]

From New South Modernizer to Sunbelt Traditionalist

Cannon Mills did not invent textile paternalism or the company-owned town, but Cannon and Kannapolis became important symbols of the southern textile industry during the 1920s due to the company's exceptional size and scale. Rhyne's typology of textile towns provides a useful entry into understanding the ways in which Cannon Mills evolved from a symbol of the southern textile industry's progressive promise to, by the 1970s, an anachronistic giant. Rhyne categorized southern mill villages into a hierarchy of four types: the rural mill village, the cotton mill town, the suburban mill village, and the company town. "Whatever objections may be raised to the company-owned town," wrote Rhyne of towns such as Kannapolis, "the companies are frequently the leaders in modern, scientific methods of town planning."[24]

As Cannon grew larger and more powerful, it diverged in many ways from the conditions that prevailed in a highly fragmented industry. The *Saturday Evening Post*, a publication known for its skepticism of the New Deal, ran a piece by the journalist Stanley High in January 1938 entitled "A Kind Word for the South," in which he recounted a trip

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 62.

through the southern states interspersed with ruminations on the progress of a region that President Franklin Roosevelt would declare later that very year "America's No. 1 economic problem."[25] He was pleased to report that "chief among the impressions with which I returned is one to the effect that one of the most important things about the South's problems is what the South is doing about them."[26] To High, the textile industry represented the promise of a brighter future for a stubbornly backward, isolated region, one that compromised the notion of progress embedded in a prevalent strain of American nationalism. And the largest firms like Comer Mills in Alabama and Cannon Mills, with their well-ordered mill villages and connections to the region's burgeoning transportation network were the most promising of all: "It seems to me that, as exceptions, they are significant."[27]

For supporters and critics alike, Cannon's symbolism as a superlative was supplemented, not supplanted, during the postwar decades by a vision of the company as a stalwart of the southern textile industry's fading past. Although Cannon Mills had not since its early years typified the southern textile industry, by the mid-1950s media references to the company and its leader, Charles Cannon, noted that the man and his company were among the last living embodiments of this or that feature of the industry's classical phase. Most significant of the postwar changes was the winding down of the company-owned mill village system. The last wave of southern mill villages were built during the 1920s, and by the 1940s, companies were actively attempting to divest themselves of these assets which, thanks to the proliferation of automobiles and competition from other manufacturing industries, no

[25] Stanley High, "A Kind Word for the South," *Saturday Evening Post*, January 28, 1938; On Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal's struggle to bring economic development to a South whose problems rested largely in the entrenchment of various local elites, see Schulman, *Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 3-38.

[26] High, "A Kind Word for the South," 53.

[27] Ibid.

longer served their original purpose of tying workers to the mill. By 1949, the phenomenon of companies selling mill houses to their workers had become so widespread that Harriet L. Herring, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, published a study marking, as the book's title put it, the *Passing of the Mill Village*. Herring saw the "revolution" as a positive development that would upend lines of "class and caste," creating citizens out of dependents.[28] It is significant to note, however, that Herring insisted that the end of a phenomenon deeply associated with the southern textile industry's history did not imply that the future of the southern textile industry was in jeopardy. "The liquidation of the cotton mill village," she wrote, "is the most recent important step which the textile industry has taken in bringing the South into line with the rest of the country."[29]

It was only as the textile industry's place of leadership in the southern progress narrative began to be challenged by the kinds of industries associated with Sunbelt modernization that the textile industry came to be viewed as an unambiguously traditionalist force.[30] By remaining committed to the very values that had once made the company an

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[28] Harriet L. Herring, *Passing of the Mill Village; Revolution in a Southern Institution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 116.

[29] Ibid. Herring's comment illustrates an early stage of what would become a widespread tendency to resolve the contradictions created by the undoing of institutions once sold as solutions but rendered problematic by historical developments by giving them a new significance as an intermediary step in an evolutionary progress narrative.

[30] The term "Sunbelt" was coined Kevin Phillips, a former speechwriter for Richard Nixon, in 1969. It unites the states of the former Confederacy with those of the Southwest, forming an imagined new region of growth that exists in opposition not to the old, as the New South did to the Old South, but to the "Snowbelt" (and later, the Rust Belt). Even as few historians would argue that the Sunbelt paradigm is a useful one for understanding the new super-region's constituent parts, several have argued that the idea of the Sunbelt has been an important force in the rise of the New Right during the second half of the twentieth century. For a useful comparative etymology of the Sunbelt / Rustbelt dichotomy see Steven High, "The Making of the 'Rust Belt' in the Minds of North Americans, 1969-1984," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997), https://dx.doi.org/10.3138/CRAS-027-01-03. For a useful primer on Sunbelt scholarship, see Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk, eds., *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Space, Place, and Region* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

exceptionally progressive force in southern development, Cannon Mills came to be associated with a pre-capitalist feudalistic mode of production. "Kannapolis is a twentieth-century barony," wrote the *Charlotte Observer*'s Jay Jenkins in a 1956 article in the left-leaning magazine, the *Nation*, "The drawbridges are invisible, but they are there all the same, ready to respond to the touch of 'Mister Cannon.'"[31]

Rather than retreating into a staunch traditionalism in opposition to the emergent forces of modernization, the textile industry staked out a new semi-peripheral role. Instead of assuming responsibility for guiding backward southern whites from the periphery into modernity, the industry sought to rebrand itself as a necessary force for pushing progress out from the modern southern core into the peripheral "shadows on the Sunbelt."[32] Even as the southern textile industry faced more direct challenges from liberals, the core-industry entrants into the southern political economy portrayed themselves as committed to the textile industry's future. As a 1970 *Charlotte Observer* article explained, "Bankers are not deserting the import-troubled and profit-poor textile industry. Instead, they are actively looking for well-managed, modern firms to back in new ventures."[33] "We believe in the textile industry, we believe in the Carolinas, and we're going to lend money to Carolina textile manufacturers," reported no less a modernizing North Carolina figure than Hugh McColl, then-Senior Vice President at North Carolina National Bank (NCNB). McColl, who would go on to mastermind the meteoric rise of NCNB (now known as Bank of America) into the largest bank in the United States at the time of his 2001 retirement. The *Observe*r added, "At

[31] J. Jenkins, "Barony in Carolina: The Town That Towels Built," *Nation*, May 12, 1956, 405.

[32] On the growing realization within and beyond the South that the so-called Sunbelt transformation was not reaching all southerners, see Schulman, *Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, esp. 174-205.

[33] George Frye, "Bankers Not Deserting Textiles," *Charlotte Observer*, June 8, 1970, America's News – Historical and Current.

the same time, the young banker – he's 35 – believes that the segments of the industry hardest hit by imports, basic operations like cotton yarn-spinning firms, should be kept in business because of their 'social importance' as large employers of untrained and unskilled workers."[34]

Textile industrialists were not content to let bankers speak for them, however. As early as the 1950s, southern textile industrialists came to view a modern approach to public relations as a means of pushing back against the perception that their industry had nothing to contribute to a changing South. In a 1951 letter soliciting fellow textile executives' support for the Textile Committee on Public Relations, Charles Cannon wrote that "I, personally, feel that the Textile Committee on Public Relations during the past four and on-half years has done an excellent job of improving the attitude of the American public toward the textile industry. I also believe you will agree with me that this attitude by the general public needed improvement."[35] For Cannon, it was important to improve the public's understanding of not only "the social benefits contributed by the mills through their sponsorship and support of health, cultural, educational and recreational programs in their communities," but also "the progress of the industry in research, training and modernization."[36] Echoing Cannon's line in 1978, Charles McLendon told fellow textile executives, "We're a twentieth-century industry with computers, lasers and high-speed automated equipment. But a lot of people out there

[34] Ibid.

[35] Charles Cannon to Elliot Springs, February 21, 1951, box 25, folder 1, Cannon Mills Collection.

[36] Ibid.

still believe we're operating much as we did a hundred years ago, and it's up to us to convince them that's just not so."[37]

Lasers were not the only testament to the southern textile industry's continuing contribution to a new kind of southern progress. Beginning in the early-1960s, southern textile mills incorporated hundreds of thousands of black people into their production process. Although dissolution of the color line in southern textile mills came only after passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the federal government's good-faith enforcement efforts, companies insisted that integration signified that the industry was not only adapting to, but serving as the vanguard of the emerging racial order of, a Sunbelt South that was becoming, in the words of its boosters, "too busy to hate."[38] "At the present time the textile industry is one of the largest employers of members of minority groups of any of the country's industries," boasted the American Textile Manufacturers Institute, "This fact can and should be used to good advantage in meeting some of the attacks made upon the industry by individuals in the Congress, by governmental bodies, and by representatives of consumer groups."[39] Textile companies' rush to take credit for the long-overdue gains accruing to black workers was no doubt opportunistic and self-serving, but it rested on a sound factual basis. Economic historian Gavin Wright found that the shift away from racially discriminatory

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[37] "N.C. Textile President: It's Time to Play Show and Tell," *Charlotte Observer,* December 2, 1979, America's News – Historical and Current.

[38] The term "too busy to hate" became a slogan for the booming Sunbelt metropolis of Atlanta. For a critical history of the myriad ways in which the term concealed deliberate efforts on the part of the region's white establishment to thwart the goal of black economic advancement, see Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

[39] W. J. Holman, Jr., "The Economic Research and Information Activity of the American Textile Manufacturers Institute," August 30, 1974, 22, Executive Office Files, Box 63, folder 1, Cannon Mills Collection.

employment practices in the southern textile industry (incomplete though it was) represented "the single largest contributor to the sharp increase in relative black incomes [in all industries nationwide] between 1965 and 1975."[40]

Emphasizing this new kind of progress, however, required writing the inherently racialized underpinnings of southern textile paternalism out of official history. Southern textile owners at the turn of the twentieth century believed, according to the contemporary account of historian Phillip Alexander Bruce, that "the potential competition of the blacks is certain to have a powerful effect, for an indefinite length of time, in maintaining peaceful relations between employer and employee."[41] In the unlikely event that, "under the influence of the federations [i.e. labor unions]," white southern millworkers became "unreasonably and unjustly exacting, there would be no hesitation among mill owners in employing the negro in cotton manufacture. It would never be possible to organize the black operatives, for their interests here, as in the purely mechanical trades would prompt them to avoid a labor union."[42]

History unfolded quite differently. Black workers did not scab their way into the mills but fought their way in as part of a wider political campaign for "jobs and freedom."[43] Many black workers viewed their employment in the industry as a right secured through struggle, a

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[40] Gavin Wright, *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 158.

[41] Bruce, *The Rise of the New South*, 186.

[42] Ibid.

[43] The lesser-known full name of the famous 1963 March on Washington is "The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom." America's history of racialized unfree labor has long galvanized and complicated attempts to organize interracial coalitions on the basis of "free labor." See Robert H. Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America since 1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

fundamentally different understanding of the possibilities arising from collective action than that older white workers who had lived through or heard about the devastating consequences of the labor organizing efforts of 1929 and 1934.[44] Corine Lytle Cannon, one of the first black people hired into a formerly all-white position at Cannon Mills explained that "it would never have been if it had not been for the Civil Rights Act, it would still be like it were."[45]

As they gained a foothold in the southern textile industry, black workers were at the vanguard of a protracted series of organizing campaigns at southern textile mills during the 1970s. The largest National Labor Relations Board election in the history of the United States textile industry took place at Cannon Mills in 1974, and as historian Lane Windham argued, "black workers at Cannon tried to accelerate the pace of change by exercising civil and labor rights remedies in tandem. Even as they pushed for increased access to the mill's full range of jobs, they also supported unionizing."[46]

At the same time, the campaign revealed the importance of whiteness to the stability of Cannon Mills' traditional paternalism. One white worker explained in a message to Don Holt recorded on a cassette tape in the run-up to the election, "And now here is uh another group of people that we'll be dealing with. The fella in the government that says 'We got to work the colored people.'"[47] Realizing that he was treading into a controversial topic, he

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[44] Cannon Mills featured prominently in the General Strike of 1934. The classic account of the strike and its legacy is found in Hall et al., *Like a Family*, 288-363.

[45] Quoted inWright, *Sharing the Prize*, 158.

[46] Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door*, 111.

[47] Audio letter to Don Holt on audio cassette, 1974, box AV-001, Cannon Mills Collection. Transcription by the author. This letter was enclosed in an envelope in the Cannon Mills archive at Duke and prior to my research, had been overlooked by the archivists as well as other scholars. I have attempted to reproduce the speaker's hesitations, which were markedly more prevalent in his discussions of race than in other parts of the tape, to demonstrate his awareness that certain rhetorical justifications for his feelings were unacceptable.

began to choose his words more carefully: "Uh, as for as having anything against black people I do not have anything, uh, I do not have anything against black people …. The way I understand uh the white people has always planned. And always tried to be equal with the colored. And they always, uh, the employees at Cannon Mills have always been nice to the negro."[48] By his logic, the government had introduced a group of outsiders into a cohesive relationship between workers and management who did not understand the bonds of trust underlying it. "And a lot of times, uh Negroes, they do have fear. I don't know why, it's just uh, it's just a dis-understanding about the thing," he explained. He believed that black workers' fear and "dis-understanding" of the Cannon Mills social order made them vulnerable to exploitation by outsiders. "I know that what few I seen, I can pretty well imagine how they feel, and-and-and what they'll do. Uh, I think this where a lot of this started at. Uh, a lot of times it's probably just a disagreement with them. They'll do what somebody else tells them to do …. And I think this is a bad situation." In his view, the fact that the union preyed upon black workers' fear and "dis-understanding" were an "unfair" attack on a just hierarchy and ultimately delegitimized the entire principle of industrial democracy:

> To uh, the way this union tried to come in there. I think it uh, it ought to be left up to the mill company, the company that operates the mill and the ones that looks at the mill situation and all that in place of this being left down to the individual. I work at the mill and I try, the rules and all, I try to obey the rules. And I think this should to be left up to the company, not to the employees, about voting to start with. Now a mill, to start with, is a lot

[48] Ibid.

different from a truck driving. There's lots of difference there in truck runnin' outfit, there's lots of difference there in truck driving and other parts that the union might be organized in. But I think that in a mill or something, that this should be up to the supervisor, up to the Cannon Mills and not left up to individually because you see what this won't be a fair– this is not fair! In other words, you might say there has been a change in the mills in the last few years and you have uh you have probably now more younger people working in the mills. And I'm not trying to use segregation and all. But I feel like putting the white people and the colored together like that, it, uh, it more or less, uh, favored them of voting for the union.[49]

By the 1970s, then, the meaning of Cannon Mills was under threat from without and within. Charles Cannon's passing in 1971 provided an opportune moment for his successor, Don Holt, to demonstrate that the firm had a renewed commitment to progress. The *New York Times* wrote of Holt, "He makes the point of broad difference between himself and 'Mr. Charlie' without in any way criticizing his sponsor and mentor."[50] Key to Holt's strategy was staking out a new relationship between Cannon Mills and the public. As Holt put it, "Mr. Cannon did his own public relations. I had to hire a public relations director."[51] That director was his longtime friend, John Harden, whose work with textile companies and North Carolina politicians had earned him the moniker "The Tar Heel Dean of Public Relations."[52]

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Harold S. Taylor, "Succeeding 'Mr. Charlie': Don Holt Brings Change to Cannon," *New York Times*, August 8, 1971, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Biographical information on Harden can be found on the website for the John Harden Papers #4702, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04702/. I did not consult the archive for this thesis, and while much of

Holt, Harden, and Harden's handpicked successor, Edward Rankin, portrayed the company's new approach to public relations as proof of its modernization. According to a 1976 *U.S. News & World Report* article entitled "Change Comes to the Company Town," "residents say … that the new management, which no longer includes any members of the Cannon family, is more open to new ideas."[53] The article noted the widespread perceptions of Cannon as owning all the land, controlling the newspaper and, in general, 'telling people when to get up and when to go to bed," but added that "it was after the death in 1971 of Charles Cannon, the man who ran the company for 50 years, that the firm began to do something about that image. It set up its first public-relations department, started an employee newspaper, opened up a visitors' center and started plant tours."[54]

Yet the company had a longstanding relationship with the public that had virtually nothing to do with its Kannapolis operations in the form of its extensive advertising in national publications. Although Holt and Harden hoped to bring the company's traditionally independent marketing operations into a wholistic approach to public relations, it would prove immensely challenging to reorient the company's marketing approach into one that sold not just towels, but Kannapolis.

Selling Cannon Mills

In August of 1986, viewers in 75 television markets in the South and Midwest were treated to a tour of Cannon Mills' Plant 1 as part of 60-second commercial advertising what a

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it remains closed to researchers, it is likely that some details about Cannon's public relations activities that do not appear in the Cannon Mills archive at Duke might be contained within Harden's personal files.

[53] Maloney, "Change Comes to the 'Company Town'."

[54] Ibid.

rising Sunbelt merchant capitalist titan was doing for a struggling New South manufacturing capitalist stalwart. According to the *Charlotte Observer*, the advertisement featured "dozens of Cannon employees, some of whom were given a Hollywood-type make up for the filming."[55] The narration began, "The American textile industry has been one of the hardest hit by foreign competition. At Wal-Mart, we thought it was time to do something to reverse the trend." Indulging working-class Americans' belief (particularly strong during the peak years of deindustrialization) that American-made goods were of a higher quality than those of Global South countries, the advertisement described how "Wal-Mart challenged Cannon to produce a line of kitchen towels and dishcloths that could compete with the foreign source. Cannon responded by producing goods that were thicker and plusher–a full 25 percent heavier than its foreign-made counterpart."[56] When the partnership was announced in November of 1985, Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton, sporting a baseball cap emblazoned with the logo of the textile industry's protectionist lobbying and advertising campaign, Crafted With Pride In The U.S.A., presented then-Cannon Mills President Doug Kinsmore with a large framed plaque announcing that "Wal-Mart Cares!"[57]

The Wal-Mart campaign was not the first time that a Cannon Mills advertisement had emphasized greater quality for the price. "If you shopped for towels with a pair of scales, you would always buy Cannon towels," began a 1929 advertisement in *Good Housekeeping,* for in scientific tests of towels at each price point between "25 cents to $2, it was found that the

[55] David Olmos, "Wal-Mart Stores Gives Cannon Mills the Business," *Charlotte Observer,* August 18, 1986, America's News – Historical and Current.

[56] Ibid.

[57] "Cannon Kitchen Items Placed with Wal-Mart," *Cannon News,* November 13, 1985, 3.

average weight of Cannon towels is 16% greater than the others."[58] The advertisement cited Cannon's size and expertise as enabling the company to help bring objectively valuable material products to its housewife consumers. "There is, of course, a reason why Cannon towels give you such exceptional wear and beauty," explained the advertisement, and it certainly was not because they were "challenged" to do so by retailers. Indeed, the entire point of Cannon's advertising was to gain power over retailers. "It is Cannon's enormous production, the largest in the world," explained the advertisement, that customers could thank for the value of Cannon Mills' products. However, where Wal-Mart situated their advertisement within Cannon's factory, Cannon Mills gave no hint as to where that production took place, nor did the firm ask the consumer to consider the southern workers who made it. The only address listed in the advertisement was "Cannon Mills, Inc., 70 Worth Street, New York City," where readers could, at "no obligation whatsoever," send their request for Cannon's booklet "Modern Ideas about Towels."[59]

Cannon Mills did not invent branded consumer advertising, just as it did not invent corporate paternalism. Yet it was the company's innovative use of consumer advertising that enabled it to develop into a powerful brand in a highly competitive industry. The combined power of its size and its brand meant that even in an industry susceptible to overproduction Cannon Mills could, as the *Wall Street Journal* explained in 1958, "set the pace in sheet prices pretty much the way U.S. Steel Corp up to this year led the way on steel price changes."[60] Cannon's advertisements portrayed the company as a friend and guardian to the

[58] Cannon Mills Company, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping*, September 1929, 149.

[59] Ibid.

[60] "More Concerns Follow Cannon Mills in Raising Sheet Prices About 2.6%," *Wall Street Journal*, August 29, 1958, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

housewife consumer, giving them the essential information necessary to ensure they were making the best purchases for their families, but not burdening them with excessive details. "Proper service in sheets depends on a great many fine points – in the materials and in the manufacture," explained a 1936 Cannon advertisement, "But those things are our worry, not yours. Depend on this: The Cannon label on a sheet is a positive, all-around guarantee."[61] Cannon's advertisements portrayed the company (and, by extension, its largely female workforce) as assuming those more unpleasant aspects of the modern housewife's sacred labor of beautifying and maintaining the modern home. "What is it about those Cannon Percales?" asked a 1954 Cannon advertisement, before going on to explain, "They're combspun. Combspun means the cotton is specially combed to give you *wonderful* wear and make these sheets feel *deliciously* smooth against your skin …. Beds almost make themselves with Cannon Fitted Sheets!"[62]

There was a discourse of work in Cannon's early advertising, but it had a distinctly white-collar character and served to obscure rather than highlight the connection between labor that went into Cannon's towels and sheets and those products' function in the home of the modern American housewife. The workers featured in Cannon's advertisements were not Cannon employees, but white-collar professionals who lent the prestige and expertise associated with their professions to the company's modernist crusade to colonize the bathroom. "Most of the communicable diseases that we are striving to bring under control are spread by personal contact, or through the use of personal articles that have recently been contaminated," reported Shirley W. Wynne, M.D., Commissioner of Health for New York

[61] Cannon Mill Company, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping*, October 1936.

[62] Cannon Mills Company, advertisement, *New York Times*, August 1, 1954, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

City, "Much can be done in the home to prevent the spread of…diseases by providing individual toilet articles, particularly towels, for each member of the family, and identifying these by special tags or individual hooks, or other devices."[63] "Bill Brown, Nationally famous Conditioner of men prominent in Finance and Industry at Brown's Physical Training Farm, Brownsdale, Garrison-on-Hudson, N.Y." agreed, explaining that "I can't understand how the family towel can persist in this enlightened age. During my thirty-six years' experience in conditioning men, I have learned that a normal, healthy condition cannot be maintained when there is uncleanliness of any nature."[64]

Conclusion

By 1971, Cannon Mills' resistance to change, both in its operations and its relationships to its various publics, had resulted in a symbol of progress becoming a symbol of the past. After the death of Charles Cannon in 1971, his successor, Don Holt, sought an altogether different approach to public relations, one that would narrate the firm's storied past while signifying its continuing relevance. Seizing on elements of both the exceptional and the exemplary aspects of its symbolism, Cannon began to pivot away from serving "the housewife" in her labor of home design and beautification, and instead appealed to its customers as consumer-citizens. Rather than asserting its power by obscuring the connection between customers and workers, Cannon began to insist that when customers purchased Cannon products, they were enabling the continuation of the firm's relationship with its

[63] Cannon Mills Company, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping*, August 1929, 134.

[64] Ibid.

workers. Performing this labor, however, would require new faces of Cannon Mills that looked nothing like Charles Cannon.

Chapter Three

Public Relations and Public Work

This crusading spirit of the managers and engineers, the idea of designing and manufacturing and distributing being sort of a holy war: all that folklore was cooked up by public relations and advertising men hired by managers and engineers to make big business popular in the old days, which it certainly wasn't in the beginning. Now, the engineers and managers believe with all their hearts the glorious things their forebears hired people to say about them. Yesterday's snow job becomes today's sermon.[1]

– Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano,* 1952

John Harden, a major figure in North Carolina public relations who was a childhood friend of Don Holt, joined Cannon Mills less than a month after Charles Cannon's death. Like a person who quickly remarries after the passing of a spouse, Holt felt it necessary to clarify that the short interval "was no disrespect to Mr. Cannon."[2] There had, in fact, been something of an informal arrangement in place between Holt and Harden. Holt became increasingly aware during the 1960s that Cannon Mills' outlier status in formalized public relations was fueling the perception of the firm's backwardness, and he and Harden had "discussed the idea of beginning a PR Department for Cannon Mills Company for several years." In the late-1940s, Harden organized what many industry observers consider to be the southern textile industry's first formalized and professionalized public relations department at Burlington Mills, an even larger operation than Cannon Mills. By 1971, Cannon Mills was

[1] Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, (1951; repr., New York: Dial Press, 2006) 91. Vonnegut came about his disdain for the enterprise of public relations honestly – from 1947-1950, he worked as a PR man for General Electric. He took up fiction writing because it offered a potential means of escaping what he called in a 1949 letter to his father, "this goddamn nightmare job." The letter was reproduced in Kurt Vonnegut, *Fates Worse Than Death: An Autobiographical Collage of the 1980s* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1991), 26.

[2] "Company's PR Dept. Topic of Magazine," *Cannon News*, October 25, 1971, 5.

the last major southern textile firm without a public relations department. It was, therefore, a bookend of sorts for Harden, who was in his late 60s at the time and managing his own public relations firm.[3] With the Public Relations Department on what Holt and Harden felt to be solid footing, the company announced the hiring of Edward Rankin, Harden's longtime friend and protégé, in August of 1971.[4]

Like Harden, Rankin was a creature of North Carolina politics whose career straddled the microscopic gap between the North Carolina textile industry and the state's political elite. His most famous associate was Luther Hodges, a longtime textile executive who went on to serve as Governor of North Carolina from 1954-1961. Prior to joining Cannon Mills, where he would remain until his retirement in 1986, Rankin worked for the North Carolina Citizens Association, an influential business lobbying organization with deep ties to Cannon Mills (Charles Cannon and Don Holt served terms as president). Holt and Harden agreed to give the Citizens Association until the end of the year to secure a replacement, and Rankin joined Cannon on January 1, 1972.[5] Harden returned to his public relations agency but remained a special assistant to Holt until Holt's retirement in 1975. Harden and Holt conceived of what was to become the Cannon Visitor Center, but much of the responsibility for bringing it to fruition fell to Rankin and Harold Hornaday, a young Cannon executive who would go on to succeed Holt as President and Chairman.

Cannon's Public Relations Department became "the talk of the industry," as *Textile World* put it in the cover story of its October 1971 edition, largely because the public had

[3] Vanderburg, *Cannon Mills and Kannapolis,* 186.

[4] "Rankin to Head PR Department," *Cannon News,* August 1971, 1.

[5] Ibid.

come to Cannon before Cannon "went public." Among the intrusions were a United States Department of Justice investigation over racial discrimination in company housing, a Ralph Nader-produced documentary, and persistent talk of unionization concentrated most heavily among Cannon's large and growing population of black and young white workers. "How do you scrape off the tar and feathers of a Justice Department charge of discrimination in housing, especially when you feel it unjustly distorts your true nature?" asked *Textile World*. "How do you disprove the guilt-by-association inference arising out of a visit by Nader's Raiders crew and a subsequent TV show determined to show your company callously and immorally dominates a town and its people, especially when all you want is good for the townspeople through their own determination? You turn to public relations."[6]

Charles Cannon had long understood that the long-term viability of operationally integrated textile manufacturing companies in the United States would depend on securing favorable public policies against imports from low-wage countries in the Global South.[7] Nevertheless, he adamantly resisted opening his company's plants to public tours, for any opening comes with risks. In 1951, while serving as President of the Textile Committee on Public Relations, a flurry of memos circulated among textile executives about "A New Kind of Mill Visit" that took place at Pequot Mills in Massachusetts.[8] As Thomas Yutzy, a New York City-based public relations professional employed by the Textile Committee on Public

[6] Quoted in Carol Whitley and John Harden, "PR Is Doing Good, Getting Credit For It," *Cannon News*, October 25, 1971, 5.

[7] In management parlance, operational integration refers to the degree to which a company owns its value chain. Many southern cotton textile manufacturers only undertook a few parts of the textile production process – taking raw cotton and turning it into yarn or taking yarn and turning it into a woven textile product. In addition to owning every step in the manufacturing process, Cannon Mills conducted its own marketing.

[8] T. M. Forbes, "Public Relations – A New Kind of Mill Visit," August 23, 1951, box 25, folder 6, Cannon Mills Collection.

Relations, described it in a letter to Charles Cannon "the union injected itself into a visit of high school students to Pequot Mills, which resulted in… vicious propaganda… in the union newspaper."[9] The article "speaks for itself," wrote a disgusted Georgia textile executive, before opining, "One statement in the story is highly significant – 'Teenagers who recently visited TWUA Local 292 headquarters here learned more about unionism than they'd ever get from books.' We hope you will read the comments which some of the students made about the mills after the visit. That their reactions were inspired by the sponsors of the visit, is obvious." [10] Among the most troubling was that of Alice Pullman, told the CIO-affiliated union's newsletter that "I wouldn't want to work in a textile mill. The air in Pequot was heavy with dampness, heat, dust, and lint."[11] Geoffrey Heywood added that "though a lot of improvements were made by the union, the mill is still not a fit place for human beings to work in."

When Charles Cannon opened his factory, he did so on his own terms, often appointing himself chief tour guide. In 1963, as the textile industry campaigned for the end of the so-called "two-price cotton system," the *Charlotte Observer* reported that "thirteen US

[9] Thomas Yutzy to Charles Cannon, November 1, 1951, Charles Albert Cannon Series, box 25, folder 4, Cannon Mills Collection.

[10] Forbes, "Public Relations – A New Kind of Mill Visit."

[11] Tom Cosgrove, "What Kids Learned in Mill Visit," *Textile Labor*, June 16, 1951, 6, Charles Albert Cannon Series, box 25, folder 4, Cannon Mills Collection. The students attended Elisabeth Irwin High School in New York's Greenwich Village, a prominent left-wing bastion. Elisabeth Irwin High School's alumni include Marxist feminist scholar and activist Angela Davis and Elliott Abrams, who rebelled against the left-liberalism of his Jewish New York upbringing to become a key figure in the Reagan Administration's foreign policy. In 1991, Abrams pled guilty to withholding information in his testimony to Congress during the Iran-Contra Affair but received a pardon from President George H. W. Bush and went on to serve in the George W. Bush and Donald Trump Administrations. On Elisabeth Irwin High School and the contrasting political careers of some of its most prominent alumni, see Dina Hampton, *Little Red: Three Passionate Lives through the Sixties and Beyond* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013).

congressmen got the 'hard sell' from a super salesman Thursday on the need for a one-price system for cotton."[12] Emphasizing that the elected officials, whatever their claims to sovereignty, were on Charles Cannon's turf, the *Observer* remarked that the tour encompassed but "a portion of the vast Cannon Mills empire here." Cannon's tour, like the company's public tours that began in 1971, traced the progress of raw cotton through each step of the production process. "He had the tour well planned to emphasize the points he wanted to make," wrote the *Observer*. The tour "began in the opening rooms where bales of cotton are split open, telling the legislators what the cotton cost. Then Cannon led the group through cleaning and other steps to a point where Cannon was wound on spools." When they reached the weave room, Cannon indulged his flair for the dramatic: "Turn to Page 3 of your itinerary. We were to see a weaving operation here. This part of the plant isn't running today, however. I hate to hurt you gentlemen from Mississippi and Arkansas and California and South Carolina and North Carolina, but we aren't running cotton there today. We can't afford that eight and one half cents." "I love every one of Cannon's 25,000 employees," he told the congressmen, "And we want to keep every one of them employed."[13]

Holt, Harden, and Rankin recognized that the exposé works as a rhetorical device because of the impression that it is taking the public behind the scenes to view a scene to

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[12] "Cannon Pushes for One-Price Cotton System," *Charlotte Observer*, January 11, 1963, America's News – Historical and Current. The two-price cotton system emerged in 1956 in response to what cotton growers insisted was an oversupply of cotton that threatened to cripple American cotton production. The government provided what amounted to a subsidy on every bale of American cotton sold outside the United States. American textile manufacturers complained that the subsidy accrued not just to American cotton growers, but to foreign cotton mills. The compromise resulted in the government redirecting the money once used for price supports to growers in the form of direct payments. See D. Clayton Brown, *King Cotton in Modern America: A Cultural, Political, and Economic History since 1945* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 296-98.

[13] "Cannon Pushes for One-Price Cotton System."

which an institution does not want them to be privy. If the company opened itself to the public in a way that maintained control of the narrative, conditions that might in another context appear backward and in need of improvement could be reframed as part of a longer story of progress and social cohesion. As described by Don Holt, "The purpose of the tour is to enable visitors to see how Cannon products are made, the skills required, and the modern machinery which helps keep us competitive. We also believe that the tour gives visitors a better understanding of the value of the American textile industry."[14]

Factories are not simply places in which inert products of the natural world transform into commodities – they also make workers, capitalists, and consumers out of people. In order for the factory to transform raw objects into valuable products, people must be organized to the demands of the production process. Control on the shop floor has often been exercised through *overseers* or *supervisors* (they have also gone by other names – boss-man was a common one in the southern textile industry), illustrating the centrality of observation to the power relations of the factory.[15] More important than ensuring that workers remain at their posts and work at a given intensity, observation enforces the employer's prerogative to dictate how work is performed. In the workplace, observation and the introduction of new forms of coercion might make a worker more efficient on the margins, but "scientific management" (often referred to as Taylorism, in honor of its progenitor and most famous practitioner, Fredrick Winslow Taylor) attempts to use observation to inform a never-ending

[14] Edward Rankin, "13 Tour Guides Begin Duties," *Cannon News*, July 24, 1972, 1.

[15] Janiewski, "Southern Honor, Southern Dishonor," 82-83.

quest to redesign the production process toward ever-more rational heights through the incorporation of new technology.[16]

Taylorism seeks to mold labor to the requirements of the production process, not to design production processes around what workers and the broader public feel to be fair or just.[17] However, as Antonio Gramsci pointed out in his famous essay, "Americanism and Fordism," the human "'subaltern' forces,' which have to be 'manipulated' and rationalized to serve new ends, naturally put up a resistance."[18] To overcome resistance to Taylorism within the workplace, industrialists extended their observation of workers beyond the workplace in an attempt to redesign workers' putatively private lives around the demands of the Taylorized factory. Ford employed a Sociological Department in order to ensure that his average worker would, as Gramsci put it, "spend his extra money 'rationally' to maintain, renew and, if possible, increase his muscular-nervous efficiency and not to corrode or destroy it."[19]

As workers became the subjects of divisions of labor, observation regimes, and work disciplines imposed by the prerogatives of capitalism, they did not simply find that the public supplanted the private. Instead, employers, workers, consumers, and publics struggled to

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[16] Taylor rose to prominence in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The literature on Taylorism is too vast to be recounted here, but for a useful discussion of the ongoing impact of Taylorism, see Martha Crowley et al., "Neo-Taylorism at Work: Occupational Change in the Post-Fordist Era," *Social Problems* 57, no. 3 (2010), https://dx.doi.org/10.1525/sp.2010.57.3.421.

[17] There is no mechanism by which a company would choose to implement a technology that would double output per worker, increase profits by 50%, result in no job losses, and double workers' assessment of their working conditions if the company believed that it could successfully implement another technology that would quadruple output per worker, increase profits by 100%, result in half of the firm's workers being laid off, and reduce by one-half the remaining workers' working conditions.

[18] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 279.

[19] Ibid., 303.

define, defend, transgress, and transcend new lines between public and private within and beyond the factory. Industrial workers and social reformers learned to use the public sphere to subject employers to the same kinds of observation and control over the factory that workers experienced. Working people have never accepted the prerogatives of capitalism unconditionally, but neither have they couched all resistance in the language of workers-versus-employer.[20] Working people's ideas about themselves and their work have influenced the development of how the public thinks about work and working people. In addition to oppositional direct action rooted in solidarity among workers, working people have demanded an imagining of the public and the public good that takes their needs and identities into account. As philosopher Hannah Arendt put it, the labor movement's great innovation was having "the audacity to identify itself with the whole of the community," not as an interest group defending traditional privileges.[21]

Traditionally excluded from what critical theorist Jurgen Habermas termed the "bourgeois public sphere," working people argued for their inclusion within the body politic by pointing to their own bodily and emotional experiences as a kind of enlightenment about the nature of the world that no amount of reason or logic could impart.[22] William Dodd, a

[20] It should go without saying that given the degree of elite-domination of the media and political systems that mediate individuals' engagement with the public sphere, so-called populist movements often witness cross-class alliances in which members of a privileged elite purport to recognize and speak on behalf of the interest of some variation of "the forgotten man." The crime implied in the term "forgotten man" is not that he is poor or suffering, but that despite his worthiness of being remembered (rooted in his contributions to a shared past), the bad elites forgot him. Forgetting often implies privileging the concerns of a less worthy sufferer over his. That a recent immigrant from Latin America may have been further from the consciousness of the "elite" and have experienced greater material suffering than an Iowa farmer who faces bankruptcy does not give the immigrant any claim to being a "forgotten man," because he has no historical claim to being remembered.

[21] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 194.

[22] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

British self-described "factory cripple," wrote in 1841 that "having witnessed the efforts of some writers (who can know nothing of the factories by experience) to mislead the minds of the public upon a subject of so much importance, I feel it to be my duty to give the world a fair and impartial account of the working of the factory system, as I have found it in twenty-five years' experience."[23] To illustrate the ways in which factory work shattered lines between public and private, Dodd supplemented his logic by exploiting the written word's ability to relate human sensory experience. Dodd wrote that when he was a boy:

> My evenings were spent in preparing for work the following day – in rubbing my knees, ankles, elbows, and wrists with oil, &c., and wrapping them in warm flannel! (for everything was tried to benefit me, except the right one – *that of taking me from the work*;) after which, with a look at, rather than eating my supper, (the bad smells of the factory having generally taken my appetite away,) I went to bed, to cry myself to sleep, and pray that the Lord would take me to himself before morning.[24]

Workers have succeeded in creating a social obligation as citizens to view work and working conditions as a matter of public interest, even if, as historian Louis Hyman argued, "Citizenship [became] a bright line between those who had rights and those who did not."[25] Companies have adapted themselves to a world in which the government is assumed to have the obligation to regulate private commercial relations on behalf of the public interest, and have learned to couch their public relations discourse not in the language of protecting

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[23] William Dodd, *A Narrative of the Experience and Sufferings of William Dodd, a Factory Cripple[...]*, 2nd ed. (London: L. & G. Seeley and Hatchard & Son, 1841), 5, http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/6CooJ6.

[24] Ibid., 12-13.

[25] Hyman, *Temp*, 41.

private property, but of free-enterprise's superior ability to provide for the public good. While often marshalled against regulations (often referred to, tellingly, as *government oversight*), the case of the southern textile industry has demonstrated that companies have used the notion of the public good to appeal for government protections against imports.

In deliberately subjecting places of work and working people to the public gaze, the factory tour gives new meaning to "public work," a term that southern textile workers used to distinguish the work-discipline and lifeways of the factory town from those of the family farm.[26] When a tourist enters into a private space of production, they are necessarily becoming part of a contested discourse about the nature of the public and of work.

On the Tour

The factory tour's long history as a cultural form in industrial capitalist societies poses something of a conundrum for Marxian theory. For Karl Marx, the exchange of products of labor concealed the social relations under which individuals transform inert and useless products of the natural world into objects of utility. He wrote in the first volume of *Capital* that "since the producers do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products, the specific social character of each producer's labor does not show itself except in the act of exchange."[27] Marx argued that "value does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labor into a social hieroglyphic."[28] Marx wrote before the advent of modern consumer branding – his use of the

[26] On workers' perceptions of "public work," see Hall et al., *Like a Family*, 44-113.

[27] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1990), 166.

[28] Ibid.

term referred to the social practice of branding the skin of criminals with a mark of shame. A cotton garment produced by the labor of slaves and destitute factory workers bore no visible traces of violence or exploitation. The making of proletarianized capitalist subjects, by contrast, demanded that "agricultural folk [be] forcefully expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded and tortured by grotesquely terroristic laws into accepting the discipline necessary for the system of wage-labor."[29]

If the production and exchange of commodities depends upon the spaces and social relations of production remaining concealed, it is difficult to conceptualize why companies should willingly subject the social relations of the factory to public view. The short answer is that to publicize is to give the public a look, not to subject to public oversight. The corporate factory tour is itself a product produced within the contested social environment of the factory.[30] Like museums and almost any other imaginable kind of text, tours are a vehicle for narrative storytelling. Even as they purport to magically transcend narrative by going behind the scenes, the tour organizes labor and capital to incorporate behind the scenes into the stage upon which the *real story* is playing. Sociologist Dean MacCannell synthesized tourism into four words: "*tourists cross the line*."[31] He added that "only a consequential line is worthy of

[29] Ibid., 899.

[30] As discussed in the previous section, no workplace can ever be entirely private – indeed, the expansion of capitalism saw a struggle to redefine the concept of public work. Conducting a tour does not make a wholly private space wholly public. The act of publicizing might be conceived of as what Michel Foucault termed a "technology of power." He inveighed,"We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals.' In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of knowledge and rituals of truth." Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 194.

[31] Dean MacCannell, *The Ethics of Sightseeing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 212. Emphasis his.

a tourist crossing," and "no line is meaningful until it has been transgressed."[32] In the act of crossing the line from the public world beyond the factory to seemingly private, privileged domain "behind the scenes," the tourist makes the factory a setting in his or her own dramas.

It is necessary, therefore, to consider not only how organizations attempt to use factory tours to narrate the company's story, but also how they structure factory tours to guide the tourist's narration of his or her own story.[33] Cannon's account of a 1971 visit by Sherill Johnson, the reigning Rhododendron Queen of North Carolina, to Plant 1 provides a telling example.[34] As she toured the plant, "her silver crown atop her head and dressed in a gaily colored mini-dress," according to *Cannon News*, Johnson remarked "I am absolutely overwhelmed by all of the operations. I never dreamed what it took to produce the washcloth that I use to wash my face every morning." And Cannon workers were surely pleased to know that while "the colors, prints, [and] washcloths with animal designs intrigued her[,] [t]he men and women cutting a towel every couple of seconds with razor-sharp scissors amazed her. 'They are much more fascinating than the automatic cutting machines.'"[35]

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Scholars in the field of museum studies have employed quantitative and ethnographic methodologies to analyze audience reactions to museums and tours. Jesse Swigger, for instance, made use of 594 visitor questionnaires in the Greenfield Village archive to demonstrate how shifting audience expectations in the consumerist postwar era influenced the museum's move away from a more open-ended curatorial style in favor of providing a packaged encounter with the past. See Swigger, *History Is Bunk*, 123-42.

If Cannon collected similar documents, they are not in the archives consulted for this thesis. The literary theory employed in this section provides a means of analyzing how Cannon Mills attempted to structure the tour to encourage particular narrative understandings, but the analysis would benefit from additional data from visitors, tour guides, and Cannon executives.

[34] Thomas Hale, "Rhododendron Queen Tours Cannon," *Cannon News,* August 1971, 8.

[35] Ibid.

The standard plant tour narrative structure might be described as a variation on the *bildungsroman* (coming-of-age tale).[36] The bildungsroman's "primary function is to make integration into the existing social order legitimate by channeling individual energy into socially useful purposes," argued literary scholar Stella Bolaki.[37] Unlike in a bildungsroman, however, the factory tour's protagonist is often the social order itself. At Cannon, "Visitors follow the general manufacturing process for towels and sheets," explained Rankin. They followed the development of a raw, useless commodity (cotton) into a fully-formed household textile product worthy of the Cannon Mills brand.[38] The first step, according to a lengthy description of a factory tour that appeared in *Cannon News*, involved workers "open[ing] and plac[ing] in the Bale-O-Mat, which begins the process by tearing the cotton so that dirt, pieces of seed, and other foreign matter fall out."[39] From there it was on to the Cotton Master, "which removes more foreign matter from the cotton fibers and then transfers

[36] Few firms could illustrate as much of the production process on a factory tour as could the vertically integrated Cannon Mills Company. Textile manufacturing is many orders of magnitude less complex than Fordist assembly line manufacturing. A twenty-first century textile mill in Bangladesh conducts the same processes as a mill in early-nineteenth-century Manchester. The machinery is more sophisticated, but a visitor to either mill would find a the same kinds of machines undertaking the same kinds of processes, not to mention workforces comprised largely of young women from the countryside. A nineteenth-century carriage workshop, by contrast, bears almost no resemblance to a modern automobile assembly plant. Factory tours have been most prevalent as a public relations strategy at factories at the end of the value chain (i.e. where the finished consumer product is assembled), but the narrative technique of tracing raw components through to their more finished form is ubiquitous even in factories that only undertake a small portion of the activities necessary to create the finished consumer product. On the differences between textile factories and modern machinery factories, see Freeman, *Behemoth*, 93-95.

[37] Stella Bolaki, *Unsettling the Bildungsroman: Reading Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Fiction* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2011), 12.

[38] Edward Rankin, "13 Tour Guides Begin Duties," *Cannon News*, July 24, 1972, 1.

[39] "Open House Features Plant Tour," *Cannon News*, October 21, 1979, 1. The description of the tour found in this piece refers to a community tour of Cannon's Plant 19 in York, South Carolina – not the tour of Plant 1 in Kannapolis. Although descriptions in Cannon News suggest that the Plant 1 tour used a similar narrative arc, this article provided more vivid descriptions of the manufacturing process.

the cotton through vacuum tubes to the carding machines." Inside the carding machines, "millions of small wire teeth on revolving cylinders continue to straighten the fibers and remove impurities. A gauze-like web of cleaned cotton fibers is then rolled into a strand of sliver (pronounced slye-ver) and coiled into tall, round containers." Next up was drawing, in which "several card slivers are combined into one strand on a drawing frame …. The result is a thick, rope-like, untwisted strand about the size of a broom handle." In a modernist ode to the company's efforts to continually revolutionize its production process, the strands were spun into yarn through "open-end spinning," which Cannon described as "an entirely new technology which is so revolutionary that, in textile terms, it has been compared to man's first step on the moon." Once spun, "hundreds of warp yarns created at the spinning frames are placed into a large spool called a section beam. These yarns will become the lengthwise threads in the cloth" (figure 3.1).[40]

[40] Ibid.

Figure 3.1. Students from A. L. Brown High School in Kannapolis on a tour of Plant 1. The original caption read: "Operator of the fringe machine, Alice Easley, shows completed fringe to Bruce and Andy Howard during students tour." Workers seemed to have had a greater degree of interaction with guests on specially-arranged school tours than on standard public tours. Photograph by J. W. Cook, *Cannon News*, March 5, 1973.

A bildungsroman traditionally ends with the protagonist, fundamentally changed by the journey chronicled in the story, becoming woven into what he or she had once considered to be an alien and alienating society. After being combined and chemically treated in a process known as "slashing," the beams, comprised of the very cotton that began its harrowing journey through the factory dirty and useless, are taken "from the slasher to the looms to be woven into fabric."[41] The tour displayed progress at each step along the cotton's journey toward a marketable state. Interestingly, the firm also advertised tours for its own workers, touting the opportunity to witness how their place in the production process fits into

[41] "Open House Features Plant Tour."

the larger story. “I had never been through the plant before and saw some places I hadn’t seen. It was very enjoyable,” Shelby Harwell, a cloth inspector who had worked at Cannon Mills for more than 19 years, told *Cannon News* in 1980.[42] The goal was not to give workers a sense of ownership over the whole of the production process, however. The company was careful to specify that “all tours for employees will be conducted by a guide.”[43]

Companies have also used the bildungsroman narrative structure to narrate consumers’ integration into the social role of the consumer-citizen. Much like Rhododendron Queen Sherill Johnson’s trip to Cannon, for the “forty housewives” profiled in an article in *Business Week* in 1966, the factory tour was “a voyage of discovery,” reconciling the breach between women’s social roles within the family and the political economy.[44] At a time of rising consumer activism, *Business Week* asserted that “forty housewives who toured 10 consumer-oriented companies return[ed] to [a] consumer conference with one message: ‘We didn’t realize that business really does care.’” On their journeys through their respective factories, they gained “a new understanding of how a mass economy ticks,” as observed through the lens of social roles in which women were expected to perform the work of caring and nurturing not only on behalf of their own families, but of the public. A woman who visited a Campbell’s Soup plant reported that despite her distaste for the company’s product, “once she had seen the cleanliness, the inspection, and the piles of food,” she acquired a newfound appreciation for the firm, if not their soups. “They have to make soups to please everybody,” she said, “I just have to please my family.” When reunited to discuss their

[42] “Employees Enjoy Plant Tour,” *Cannon News,* August 4, 1980, 6.

[43] “Cannon Invites Visitors,” *Cannon News,* August 1971, 1.

[44] "Wowing the Ladies," *Business Week,* March 26, 1966, 90-91.

respective plant tours, even a woman who "had asked some pretty mean questions" during her trip to Corning Glassworks had taken to referring to her host as "my company," and was so impressed with the frankness of the answers she received that she would only recount them to *Business Week* off the record "so she wouldn't 'bite the hand that fed her.'" As in a coming-of-age tale, the "forty housewives" were, according to *Business Week*, deeply changed by their voyage, even as they had yet to grasp the full magnitude of their transformation: "Whether they were aware of it or not, these women emerged from their tours with a message for business. They were amazed at the amount of effort required to prepare a reputable product for the store shelves and they said so repeatedly, prefacing their remarks with, 'I had no idea… .'"[45]

Gender, Race, Class, and the Labor of Relating to the Public

The gendered division of labor that characterized the production of textile products at Cannon Mills was no less embedded in the production of public relations.[46] In a September 1971 article in *Cannon News*, Harriette Ward, whose byline tended to accompany human-interest stories, noted that "In any business firm, the front door to good public relations is

[45] Ibid. Ellipses in original.

[46] In the field of labor studies, the notion of a gendered division of labor does not refer to an objective statement that more women than men (self-identified or otherwise) engage in a particular paid or unpaid form of labor. Instead, it refers to (re)productive labor that has been feminized, that is, associated via the "production of difference" with qualities supposedly endemic to women and their natural role in society. Feminist scholars emphasize the centrality of power disparities to producing and upholding the lines of difference around which labor is organized (gender, race, class, citizenship status, age, skill, etc.) as well as the centrality of divisions of labor to upholding those power structures. Taking a cue from social movements, scholars have grown increasingly cognizant of intersectionality among categorizations in producing subjectivities rather than attempting to privilege one subjectivity above others. For a useful study of how the racialization and feminization of labor have evolved in concert with liberal reform efforts aimed at ending rigid lines of discrimination, see Venus Green, *Race on the Line: Gender, Labor, and Technology in the Bell System, 1880-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

found at the company's telephone switchboard. A cheerful voice, a 'good morning, good afternoon,' or other pleasant greeting helps paint a picture of the firm in the mind of the caller."[47] Callers were under no such obligation. Ward noted that "Practices not appreciated by the operators are lack of patience, lack of understanding, and slamming the phone in our ear." Cannon's "three-women [sic] operators" responsibilities went beyond the rote task of placing phone plugs into the appropriate jacks. In addition to having to produce a standardized affect even when feeling worn down by long days and impolite callers, the women needed the problem-solving abilities and presence of mind to spring into action from the lull of routine and track down top executives in the event of an emergency.

In an accompanying photograph, *Cannon News* captured Larry Wagoner and Reece Henson of the instrument department tinkering with telephone circuitry, declaring that "they keep the phones ringing." Where Ward deferred to the switchboard operators to explain the emotional and affective labor performed by "The voices of Cannon," it fell to Waggoner to demystify the technical details of the company's phone system. In addition to providing the expertise necessary to enable the women to do their jobs, Waggoner's instrument department organized a system through which feminine affective labor could be applied selectively, only where it was deemed (by male managers) to bring value to the enterprise. While the women handled, by Waggoner's estimation, 4,000 calls a day, 21,000 "local calls by Cannon

[47] Harriette Ward, "Good PR Begins at Switchboard," *Cannon News,* September 1971, 3. At Cannon Mills, what was meant by "women" was often white women of a particular class status. A working-class white person in Kannapolis might be said to "sound country" – thus disqualifying them from certain public-facing jobs but not of other forms of white privilege such as company housing. The speech of working-class black people who did not speak like middle-class white people was racialized as endemic to their race, not their class or rural heritage. The integration of the company in the 1960s challenged the contradictory and tenuous relationships between racialized, gendered, and classed thinking in Kannapolis.

employees … bypass[ed] the board and [were] handled automatically by the panels of gadgets and wires in the instrument department located in the rear of the switchboard."[48]

A similar dynamic took shape in Cannon's plant tour program. Textile mills are not known for being the kind of scenic, serene places that many tourists seek out to spend their free time. Longtime North Carolina business journalist David Mildenberg recalled of his visit to meet with Ed Rankin and tour Plant 1 as a young reporter at the evening daily, the *Charlotte News*, that the "enormous plant… was extremely loud with clanging machines. It was very dusty place with a lot of workers and huge looms in a building that seemed to stretch for blocks."[49] After roughly one year of the manager-guided tours, in July 1972, the company announced that it had enlisted the services of, in Ed Rankin's words, "thirteen attractive female tour guides."[50] Rankin wanted the guides to be an antidote to an otherwise drab environment. Calling attention to their performative roles, they wore "newly-designed costumes," which included "beautifully-fashioned pants suits with tunic top and tailored pants…. The bright and gay colors are cream, lilac, orange, azalea, aqua and beige" (figure 3.2).

[48] Ibid.

[49] David Mildenberg, email message to author, October 1, 2019.

[50] Edward Rankin, "13 Tour Guides Begin Duties," *Cannon News,* July 24, 1972, 1. The company typically suspended the tours during the winter months but would still accommodate groups.

PRESIDENT DON HOLT chatted with the Cannon tour guides during their first training session where all were dressed in their uniforms. Mr. Holt emphasized the importance of their new work, and thanked them for their efforts in behalf of Cannon Mills. This photo was made in the Board of Directors room at the Main Office.

Figure 3.2 Don Holt with Cannon Mills tour guides, with original caption. *Cannon News*, August 7, 1972.

"They are all Cannon folks, of course" wrote Rankin of the tour guides in *Cannon News*, but rather than entrusting the important work of mediating between the company and the public to any of the thousands of working-class women who worked in jobs such as carding, spinning, and weaving, the tour guides were of decidedly middle-class status.[51] Six of the guides were "housewives," as the company described them in all internal and external communications, whose husbands worked in managerial positions at Cannon Mills ranging from assistant purchasing agent to plant manager.[52] As indicated in a job description, the company sought "well educated" women who "speak easily and with good vocabulary," and whose "appearance and personality will reflect credit on the company."[53] With the exception

[51] Ibid.

[52] Edward Rankin, "Background Data Given," *Cannon News*, July 24, 1974, 6.

[53] Edward Rankin, "Plans for Cannon Visitor Center," box 65, folder 4, Cannon Mills Collection.

of one full-time Visitor Center manager, Ruth Orland (who received a promotion from head tour guide upon the completion of the Cannon Visitor Center in October 1974) the firm did not have to provide the kind of compensation structure or professional status that would have been necessary to secure the services of middle-class men.[54] Because of their husbands' comfortable salaries and cultural norms regarding middle-class women engaging in paid labor outside the home, there was a sufficient supply of "housewives" married to members of Cannon's management class who proved willing to take on the work on an explicitly feminized basis.[55]

Supplementing the "housewives" during busier periods and during large group visits were seven full-time Cannon employees drawn from traditionally feminized white-collar jobs in the accounting and personnel departments. During periods of high demand, one or more of the white-collar workers would be excused from her usual responsibilities and report to Visitor Center to lead tour groups.[56] There do not appear to be surviving documents that indicate whether the full-time employees received additional compensation for leading tours.

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[54] "Manager of Center Appointed," *Cannon News*, October 7, 1974, 1. Management began to schedule plant maintenance projects to occur during the winter, the least busy period for plant tours, and these projects sometimes required a complete cessation of tours for months at a time. If the tour guides were not tied to Cannon Mills through the Fordist family wage, the company could have expected more pushback from workers over limiting their ability to earn a living. Museums and public history sites are by no means immune from conflicts between workers and management. See Amy M. Tyson, *The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on Public History's Front Lines* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013).

[55] Although women in the textile industry tended to make less money than their male counterparts even in working-class jobs that were open to men and women, the Fordist family wage prevailed only in the textile industry's upper echelons. That is, while a male weaver would expect his wages to be marginally higher than that of a female weaver's, his wages could not have reasonably been expected to support his entire family. Indeed, in the early days of the southern textile industry, it was common for companies to only provide housing to families who pledged a certain number of family members per bedroom to work in the mill. See Hall et al., *Like a Family*, 51-52.

[56] Edward Rankin, "13 Tour Guides Begin Duties," *Cannon News*, July 24, 1972, 1.

However, given that the company had an ample white-collar female workforce from which to fill seven spots, the limited opportunities for advancement available to white-collar women, and the fact that *Cannon News* framed guiding as an honor and, more subtly, an escape from the monotony of the office, it seems likely that any financial inducements that may have existed were small.

Replacing the plant managers with female tour guides came with trade-offs in the eyes of Rankin and Holt. They believed that women would naturally form stronger connections with the company's imagined housewife consumer, while also providing, like the switchboard operators, a more pleasant public face for the company. In addition, a group of workers dedicated exclusively to leading tours would enable the company to accommodate walk-ins rather than having to arrange tours around managers' availability.[57] On the other hand, the narrative structure of the factory tour depended upon the tour guide's ability to convey with authority how management organized workers and machinery to transform raw cotton into valuable consumer products. Rankin ultimately concluded that he could teach the women the necessary technical details far more easily than he could train the company's managers (or any group that included men, for that matter), to produce the desired feminine affect.

The decision to hire the tour guides, then, did not reflect a desire on the part of Holt and Rankin to employ a new narrative structure for the tours, but to employ narrators whom the company believed best suited to adapt the narrative to a public of consumer-citizens. To mitigate the tour guides' perceived natural inability to convey technical knowledge, Rankin took it upon himself to ensure that the women received adequate training in the masculine

[57] Ibid.

responsibilities inherent in their new job. *Cannon News* reported that "the guides received their training through the efforts of the manufacturing and public relations departments. Experienced supervisors, who have led many tours during the past year, worked with the women guides. Each step of the manufacturing process along the tour route was carefully explained."[58] Illustrating the tour guides' class-status and social distance from the rank-and-file workers, in 1975 *Cannon News* reported that the tour guides "learned to operate the Draper shuttleless terry Jacquard loom at the Cannon Visitor Center as part of their duties," adding that "the Cannon tour guides now have a lot more respect for a weaver's occupation and a much better understanding of a loom's operation."[59] Perhaps to avoid offending any weavers among the publication's readership, the article made a point of noting that their nine hours of training did not make them "full-fledged weavers. They were only taught enough to enable them to demonstrate the operation of the loom." Looms were not the only machinery the tour guides were called upon to operate. In November 1972, the staging area for the tours relocated from the Main Office adjacent to Plant 1 to the Old Sewanee Theater in downtown Kannapolis, which the firm had recently christened the Cannon Visitor Center (the museum component would not open until October 1974). Because the Visitor Center was located several blocks from Plant 1, the company also purchased a 12-passenger van to transport visitors to the plant. Rankin reassured readers of *Cannon News* that "each tour guide was given special instruction in driving the mini-bus as part of her tour duties."[60]

[58] Edward Rankin, "Visitor Center Opens for Tours," *Cannon News*, November 13, 1972, 1.

[59] "Tour Guides are Weavers," *Cannon News*, March 1, 1975, 6.

[60] Edward Rankin, "Visitor Center Opens for Tours," *Cannon News*, November 13, 1972, 1.

Although Rankin did not view the women as professionals who could help improve the overall design and structure of the tour, he was highly deferential to women's judgement in their presumed area of expertise – cultivating bonds of connection through their personal interactions with guests. To ensure standardization with other faces of Cannon, he turned to "Mrs. Hulene Morgan, main office receptionist," who "assisted the new guides in preparing for their tour duties."[61] Once they had completed their training, *Cannon News* often highlighted the tour guides' autonomy in more stereotypically feminine aspects of their jobs. Harriette Ward reported in a 1972 *Cannon News* article that "when fourteen North Carolina distributive Education Coordinators from the Fashion Merchandising Institute at Rowan Tech toured Cannon's Plant 1 last week, they handed Judy Hill, tour guide, a bouquet." One of the women "voiced the group's feeling, saying: 'It was excellent. Our guide explained the process in a simple, direct manner, just enough information and not too much. The people were so friendly. I'll appreciate my towels more now!'"[62]

Just as women tour guides, once properly educated, could intuitively adapt their presentation to provide "just enough information and not too much" for each audience, they could also use their presumed lack of knowledge and authority to deflect probing questions relating to the factory's working conditions and social relations. Other than the accounts of plant tours published in *Cannon News*, which predictably excluded any mention on the part of guests (or workers, for that matter) of unjust working conditions at the plant, there are few contemporary accounts of the tours. One exception came as an anecdote in a 1987 *Charlotte Observer* story about an exchange program between Charlotte and Belfast, Northern Ireland,

[61] Ibid.

[62] Harriette Ward, "Teachers: Tour 'Great'," *Cannon News*, July 24, 1972, 6.

in which the author recounted that her Northern Irish guest "asked the tour guide about protection for the workers' hearing and breathing [and] inquired [about] how much they earned. She was told that the company provided the protection but the decision to wear it was up to the workers. The guide was not prepared to discuss salaries." The visitor admitted later that "I'm afraid I was a bit cheeky. But I wanted to know."[63]

While Cannon Mills deliberately flaunted the femininity of its tour guides, it chose not to highlight the fact that the group included two black women, Janette Allen (pictured above, third from left) and Anita Parker. "Janette C. Allen of Concord … works in accounts receivable," wrote *Cannon News* in an article profiling each of the tour guides "Janette likes to read, travel, listen to music and has a special interest in her dog named 'Jet.'" Parker's profile read: "Anita L. Parker of Route 29 in Kannapolis is employed in the personnel department. She enjoys reading, sewing, and listening to music."[64] Other than their relative brevity (which was likely due to the fact that Parker and Allen were unmarried – the longer profiles were mostly occupied with details about the tour guides' husbands and children), there was nothing to distinguish Allen and Parker from their colleagues.

The hyperconsciousness of race, class, age, and gender evident in certain aspects of the company's public relations lends meaning to its selective silences. In ahistorical, highly managed contexts in which Cannon Mills' longstanding practice of subsequently outlawed forms of employment discrimination remained safely out of focus, the company could bolster its business-progressive credentials. *Cannon News* published numerous profiles of

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[63] Pat Borden Gubbins, "Exchange Program a Force for Fast Friendships," *Charlotte Observer*, December 2, 1987, America's News – Historical and Current.

[64] The company gave brief background information about all thirteen guides in Edward Rankin, "Background Data Given," *Cannon News*, July 24, 1974, 6.

trailblazing employees such as Theodore H. Redrern, Jr., whom Rankin called "a youthful black who is making quite a name in Cannon Mills Company's merchandising fields," or "Mrs. Doris Featherstone," in an article entitled "She's a Lady Loomfixer."[65] The profiles never called into question the existence of innate racial or sex-based characteristics, nor did they suggest that the entrance of black and female workers into jobs from which they had been barred undercut the longstanding logic that had, until very recently, justified their exclusion.

Nearly all of the of profiles of trailblazing black and female workers in *Cannon News* laid out a normative vision of the typical "Negro" or woman, then explained how the profiled employee worked to personally defy that stereotype in order to become the best person for the job. Rankin wrote that Theodore Redrern had "a different take" on opportunity than the what Rankin considered to be the prevailing view among black people in the early-1970s: "His philosophy: 'A negro in this country should have opportunity through his own ability, qualifications, and purpose.'"[66] In an article about James Barnhardt, a foreman at Plant 9's cotton warehouse (an area of the operation that had traditionally employed black male workers and white male managers) written at the height of the Black Power Movement in 1972, James Hale noted approvingly that "he doesn't take to the soap box and rave about his job. He calmly supervises his crew and says he plans to remain with it. 'No complaints,' he says when asked about the work."[67]

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[65] "Cannon Sales Ace Moves Up," *Cannon News,* August 21, 1972, 1.

[66] Edward Rankin, "Cannon Sales Ace Moves Up," *Cannon News,* August 21, 1972, 1.

[67] "Foreman's Race No Handicap," *Cannon News,* November 8, 1971, 3. It was due to the imperative of performing what the white people who controlled so many American social and economic hierarchies (including, it must be stated, labor unions) viewed as acceptable black behavior as a precondition of earning the right to upward economic and social mobility that one of the central political concerns of the Black Power Movement involved building black-owned economic

A sense of humor about what some might call a hostile work environment was also a must for workers in jobs outside of their natural places. In its profile of Doris Featherstone, *Cannon News* wrote that "Male weavers on the third shift in No. 1 weave at Plant 1 probably will be hoping their machines develop more troubles in the future. The reason: an attractive lady loom fixer is now on the job."[68] Featherstone leaned into the "kidding" from her male colleagues with typical feminine grace, neither challenging the masculinity of the work nor suggesting that her ability to the job compromised her femininity: "After she completed her training and went on the job, a fellow fixer told her, 'Just wait until you have to crawl under a loom and get that blond hair full of grease.' She has taken all the kidding in good humor and the thought of getting dirty and greasy hasn't bothered her at all."[69]

Conclusion

The *New York Times* recounted in their 1971 profile of Don Holt that "in his first interview after becoming chairman, Mr. Holt said he agreed 90 percent with everything Mr.

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institutions. One of the most significant and widely publicized black-owned development projects, Soul City in Warren County, NC, broke ground in 1973. Like Kannapolis, Soul City was to be a planned industrial community (albeit one not dominated by a single employer, yet nonetheless guided by a single visionary man) built in the rural southern Piedmont. Soul City adapted much of the textile industry's New South utopianism to a Black Power politics – its chief proprietor, civil rights movement veteran Floyd McKissick, claimed to be, like James Cannon, a "visionary" who could overcome the problem of class conflict among workers and industry through careful planning and cross-class racial solidarity. Soul City ultimately amounted to a failed venture, but the excitement it generated demonstrated that black people within and beyond the South sought alternatives to earning inclusion into a white-dominated power structure that had excluded and exploited black working people on terms dictated by the white power structure. On Soul City, see Christopher Strain, "Soul City, North Carolina: Black Power, Utopia, and the African American Dream," *Journal of African American History* 89, no. 1 (2004), https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/4134046; Timothy J. Minchin, ""A Brand New Shining City": Floyd B. Mckissick Sr. And the Struggle to Build Soul City, North Carolina," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (2005), www.jstor.org/stable/23523505.

[68] "She's a Lady Loomfixer," *Cannon News,* August 6, 1973, 8.

[69] Ibid.

Cannon … did for Cannon Mills and Kannapolis. He says now he is sorry he let that slip; everyone keeps deviling him about the other 10 percent."[70] Holt could not help but recognize the importance of signifying his commitment to preserving the paternalistic system of labor relations upon which the company's production depended. Nonetheless, he hoped that adopting a "modern" public relations strategy would enable him to differentiate himself from his mentor among sections of the public (including within the company's workforce) that were becoming increasingly critical of Cannon Mills for resisting forces that had come to be associated with progressive change. Presiding as he did over a vertically integrated company whose success depended upon the ability to sell the Cannon brand, Holt understood the importance of organizing production–whether of goods or public relations–around what could be sold on the market. He remained, however, an operations manager at heart. "There's nobody in New York telling anybody down here what dyes to buy," he told the *New York Times*, "They do their work and we do ours. If we can't make what they can sell, or they can't sell what we can make, somebody … will be out of a job."[71] The company's factory tour program, however, dissolved the longstanding line between the company's Kannapolis-based manufacturing operations and its New York-based sales subsidiary. Cannon's executives found that producing public relations "behind the scenes" on the shop floor where women and men labored making towels and sheets demanded a kind of expertise not found within their all-male management class, leading the firm to organize feminized middle-class labor in the form of costumed middle-class female tour guides. Producing a history of

[70] Taylor, "Succeeding 'Mr. Charlie': Don Holt Brings Change to Cannon."

[71] Ibid.

Cannon Mills for the public would prove no less challenging and contentious than producing the factory tour.

Chapter Four

Public Relations and Public History

The first museum at Cannon Mills was an exercise in "history from below," not because it privileged the perspectives of working people in its methodological approach, but because it was located in the basement of the company's corporate headquarters in downtown Kannapolis. It was, by the company's own admission, "a modest museum," so much so that a *Cannon News* article released soon after its 1971 completion began by asking "Did you know that there is a museum at Cannon Mills Company?"[1] Although a few of its exhibits, including the desk of James Cannon and the Towel Hall of Fame, would find their way into the more elaborate Cannon Visitors Center three years later, the company did not consult with museum professionals in its creation. As *Cannon News* explained, "Dip Puckett, interior decorator at Cannon Mills, might well be called the curator of the museum because it was she who organized and assembled the treasured products which line the walls in glass cases." Among them was "Cannon's Bronzed Baby," the Crystal Palace towel, which sold more than 12 million units between its introduction in 1962 and 1970. "You and I bronze a baby's shoe because we know too well there will never be another shoe quite as dear or special," wrote Harriet Ward in *Cannon News*, "Cannon Mills has a dear and special baby, too, named Crystal Palace. In 1970, the 12,000,000th bath towel now known to be the number one fashion ensemble in the world, was bronzed and now lies gleaming in the Cannon Museum."[2]

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[1] Harriet Ward, "Main Office Basement Tells History of Firm," *Cannon News*, October 25, 1971, 1.

[2] Ibid.

Although the museum did not open until 1971, it traced its origins to another of its exhibits: "A letter from Mrs. Mary E. McGill of Merion, Pa., which has had special care ever since Mr. Charles Cannon received it in 1939," along with "two towels from a case her father bought in 1899. She believed them to be among the first towels made by Cannon. There is evidence Mr. Cannon thanked her warmly and spoke even then of a museum where these would be displayed."[3] It is unsurprising that the company's marketing and design staff would settle on the material culture of Cannon's changing towel designs to narrativize the company's history. For them, the story of the company was the story of its marketing successes and failures. The patterns and texture of each towel mediated the company's connection to their housewife consumers. When they satisfied her needs, times were good. When a pattern failed to pop, times were bad. Anchoring the story of change told by the towels was the studying presence of James Cannon's desk.

Workers were not featured in the museum, but the company explained how they, too, could connect to the story of the company as told through its towels. Not long after opening the museum, *Cannon News* reported that "a quick trip to the basement museum was of great interest" to former worker Ester Smith, who had recently retired from her job in the sample department. Highlighting the worker's connection to the narrative presented in the towels, the article explained that "she remembered, while noting the attractive product displays, that she used to inspect the goods which came out to Dip Puckett for this use."[4] The towels had meaning for workers, but rather than telling the story of a company's success, the towels were but one piece of the material culture of the workplace. Smith was not engaging in

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ann Cook, "'Love My Work,' Visitor Attests," *Cannon News*, October 25, 1971, 7.

critique of how the exhibit reconstructed a history in which she had participated (and if she had been, it is unlikely that *Cannon News* would have reported it). Instead, she was imposing an alternative meaning through a perspective with which the exhibit made no attempt to engage.

Like the factory tour, the museum evolved into a more professionalized undertaking, but attempts to professionalize the museum did not prove capable of resolving the conflicts over how to present the company's history to the public at a time of significant change. Two conflicting approaches from two kinds of experts competed in displaying and narrating Cannon Mills' relationship to the past, present, and future through the Cannon Visitor Center. The first expert was Raymond Pisney, the museum professional hired to conduct historical research and create an exhibit storyline. Employing what he described as "the Namier approach," a reference to Sir Lewis Namier (1888-1960), the British historian and public intellectual famous for his meticulous institutional histories, Pisney placed Cannon Mills' products and marketing strategies within the context of the company's history as a New South enterprise.[5] The second expert is that of the company's New York-based marketing

[5] Raymond F. Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline for the Cannon Visitor Center," (hereafter cited as "Exhibits Storyline") January 30, 1973, i, Executive Office Files, box 65, folder 4, Cannon Mills Collection. It should be noted that his reference to Namier appeared Pisney's description of the "Cannon People" exhibit, not in the introduction to the entire exhibit storyline document.

There are several ways one could interpret Pisney's namechecking of Namier. It is possible to detect Namier's influence in Pisney's approach, but Namier, whatever one might say about the enduring value of his scholarship or his Tory political leanings, would have been a terrible corporate museum consultant. Where Pisney constantly emphasized the harmony of the Cannon Mills social structure, Namier, like his American contemporary, Charles Beard, saw a self-serving elite driving historical development through their control of institution and set out to understand the actions of British Parliament in the eighteenth century by exhaustively analyzing the economic interests of its members. He might have admired James and Charles Cannon's ability to intervene in local, state, and national politics to secure assistance from governments in achieving their priorities and would not have wanted potentially embarrassing information uncovered in the course of his research swept under the rug. Unlike Beard, a Progressive historian who hoped that societies could at least partially transcend elite domination, Namier saw squabbling among a small minority of self-serving elites as the best

wing. When Pisney completed his engagement, Mel Kister and other Cannon Mills marketing executives pushed for, and ultimately succeeded in implementing, significant design changes that amounted to an upending of Pisney's totalizing progress narrative. The marketing department's redesign of Pisney's narrative attempted to present Cannon Mills as aligned to the modern needs of empowered consumers. Ironically, it was Pisney's narrative, in which the company was inseparable from its attendant social order, which would prove to be ahead of its time.

Professional Services

Cannon News announced on August 7, 1972 that the firm had hired Raymond F. Pisney "to provide professional expertise in planning the exhibition area" of the Cannon Visitor Center.[6] Pisney graduated from Loras College in his native Iowa with a bachelor's in history in 1963 before going east to the University of Delaware, where he received a Master of Arts in Historical Agency and Museum Training (a field that has since come to be known as public history). Other highlights in what Ed Rankin described as Pisney's "solid background in academic achievements" included working at the Du Pont-endowed Eleutherian Mills-Hagely Foundation, Inc. in Wilmington, Delaware, well as earning a certificate in historical administration from Colonial Williamsburg.[7] Pisney then went to

possible form of governance, provided that the entrance into the elite class was not too closely guarded. For a useful discussion of Lewis Namier's methodology, sometimes referred to as "prosopography" or "collective biography," see Krista Cowman, "Collective Biography," in *Research Methods for History*, ed. Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

[6] Edward Rankin, "Pisney to Plan Exhibit," *Cannon News*, August 7, 1972, 1. All details about Pisney's career in this paragraph appeared in the article.

[7] The tendency of American industrialists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to celebrate and museumize Americana was widespread, including the Rockefellers with Colonial

work for the State of North Carolina's Department of Archives in 1966 where he held the title of Assistant Administrator of the Division of Historic Sites and Museums. Pisney resigned from that job in order to take on the Cannon Visitor Center assignment.[8]

Pisney's task was not altogether different from those of other consultants commonly employed at manufacturing firms such as Cannon Mills in the early 1970s: to use his expertise to assist executives in decisions relating to the organization of spaces, processes, and information. Management consulting emerged from the tradition of scientific management pioneered by the engineer Fredrick Winslow Taylor around the turn of the twentieth century, but as historian and former management consultant Lewis Hyman argues, the value proposition of management consultants shifted during the postwar era from providing technical expertise to serving as information organizers and filterers.[9] Firms such as McKinsey & Company began to tout their ability to apply a bank of institutional expertise gained through prior consulting engagements to assist clients in crafting solutions to their unique business problems.[10] McKinsey trained its associates to communicate their findings through the mode favored by historians – interweaving analysis within a narrative. Hyman noted that to overcome clients' institutional inertia and bring business plans to fruition, "Analysis needed to become narrative, and that narrative needed to appeal not only to reason

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Williamsburg and Henry Ford with Greenfield Village. The Hagely Museum's website describes the museum thusly: "Located on 235 acres along the banks of the Brandywine in Wilmington, Delaware, Hagley is the site of the gunpowder works founded by E. I. du Pont in 1802. This example of early American industry includes restored mills, a workers' community, and the ancestral home and gardens of the du Pont family." "About Us," Hagley Museum and Library, accessed March 8, 2020, https://www.hagley.org/about-us.

[8] Following the completion of contract with Cannon Mills, Pisney secured a position at the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace Foundation in Staunton, Virginia.

[9] Hyman, *Temp*, 135.

[10] McKinsey & Company is the world's largest consulting firm.

but also to feelings. Stories, not data, moved people to act."[11] Cannon Mills' executives looked to Pisney for his knowledge about museum audiences as well as technical advice in creating and staging exhibits, but his primary task was to organize information into a story.

In a 1955 article in the journal *Challenge*, management consultant Howard Suslack defended the value proposition of management consultants to a postwar managerial culture skeptical of outside interference in a way that did not call into question the value of corporate managers, writing: "Many times companies will try to analyze themselves in order to make improvements in their methods and staff. The results of these 'do-it-yourself' programs are often slow, costly and ineffectual. … it is difficult to be objective about one's own company, associates, products and procedures."[12] Cannon Mills executives, particularly the firm's first Director of Public Relations, John Harden (himself something of a hybrid insider-consultant), had tried their hand at organizing and presenting the company's history.[13] From the time *Cannon News* began publishing in the summer of 1971, the newspaper churned out dozens of company history articles, which ranged from long-form syntheses to interviews with "old-timers." Unsurprisingly, the workers interviewed for these pieces heaped praise on the company's benevolent management–from James and Charles Cannon down to their overseer on the shop floor–and testified to the improved working conditions since they first went to work in the mills in their early adolescence. However, the pieces occasionally included fascinating insight into early twentieth-century southern textile mill life that would not be out

[11] Hyman, *Temp*, 79.

[12] Howard R. Suslak, "Management Consultants," *Challenge* 3, no. 9/10 (1955): 37, www.jstor.org/stable/40716971.

[13] Harden, as noted in Chapter Three, established Cannon Mills' public relations department in 1971, then turned it over to his protégé, Edward Rankin, remaining on as a special advisor to his longtime friend, Don Holt.

of place in such works of new social history as Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et al.'s *Like a Family*. "Not many people would recall this today, but there is still a room outside the spinning room, called a tower where working mothers in bygone days left their babies and small children in cribs," as one female worker matter-of-factly explained to Harden. She continued, "By an agreed arrangement, one of the mothers would take a quick inspection tour of the bedroom size area to make sure all was well in the tower. It wasn't quiet, I can assure you, but the kids kinda got used to the spinning frames on the other side of the wall."[14]

Although the pieces in *Cannon News* illustrate the extent to which the public relations department saw company history as an important means of ensuring worker loyalty at a time of significant changes at Cannon Mills and in the southern textile industry, the stakes of memory were different when presented in the pages of the company newspaper than they were within the space of a museum. As political theorist Benedict Anderson observed, mass-produced news has provided far-flung people with continual reassurance that their "imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life."[15] Monuments and shrines predate what Anderson termed "print-capitalism" by many millennia, but formalized public history has assumed complementary functions to those of mass-produced news in the formation and reformation of imagined communities.[16] Museums endeavor to communicate truths from the past that tell *us* who *we* are (and, more implicitly, are not). These truths become valorized in part by the

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[14] James Hale, "Plant 7 Explains Tale of Existence," *Cannon News,* November 8, 1971, 5. Although Hale wrote the piece, he noted that Harden had conducted the interviews.

[15] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2016), 35.

[16] Anderson argued that the mass-distribution of books and newspapers in vernacular languages enabled "the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time," with a distinct absence of the narrative trope common to legends and chronicles in which events and characters were presented in relation to their genealogies (i.e. Adam begat Seth, Seth begat Enosh, etc.). Ibid., 26.

implied promise that the site's permanent presence will communicate truths about *us* to posterity.[17] A museum, in other words, raises the stakes of memory.[18] Where *Cannon News* tended to present the past for the reader by asking *remember this?*, museums and monuments insist that the public *Remember This!*.

Just as the company could use *Cannon News* to narrate the experiences and meaning of black and female employees working in formerly white and/or male jobs, Harden and other members of the public relations staff sometimes explicitly addressed issues of race and gender in their historical pieces. James Hale, a *Cannon News* reporter, wrote of the company's Plant 9 in Concord that what appeared to be just an ordinary cotton spinning mill in fact "has a history" – it had been "built by [a] black for blacks."[19] Echoing much of the same language that John Harden and Raymond Pisney used in describing the New South social mission of Cannon Mills founder, James Cannon, Hale wrote that Warren Clay Coleman, a "man with a vision," "wanted to build a cotton mill where cotton, a raw material produced in his section, could be manufactured into yarn by an all-black work force." According to Hale, Coleman's "experiment" was designed "to prove that the black man was

[17] As Anderson noted on the modern idea of *us*, "How strange it is to need another's help to learn that this naked baby in the yellowed photograph, sprawled happily on the rug or cot, is you. The photograph, fine child of the age of mechanical reproduction, is only the most peremptory of a huge modern accumulation of documentary evidence (birth certificates, diaries, report cards, letters, and the like) which simultaneously records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, *identity* (yes, you and that naked baby are identical) which, because it can not be 'remembered,' must be narrated." Ibid., 204.

[18] It should be noted, however, that the Cannon Visitor Center intended to speak to a public beyond Kannapolis whereas *Cannon News*'s readership consisted almost entirely of Cannon Mills workers and retirees.

[19] James Hale, "Plant 9 Has History: Built by Black for Blacks," *Cannon News*, December 6, 1971, 1. Warren Clay Coleman is a well-known figure in North Carolina history. See Allen Edward Burgess, "Tar Heel Blacks and the New South Dream: The Coleman Manufacturing Company, 1896-1904" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1979).

capable of operating the machinery used to manufacture cotton into yarn," an undertaking that proved to be "a struggle from the beginning."[20] Hale then recounted how upon Coleman's untimely passing in 1904, his white patrons foreclosed on the operation, with James Cannon acquiring the mill for his firm in 1906. That Cannon Mills operated the mill in accordance with the traditional racialized division of labor until forced to change by federal enforcement of the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 went unmentioned.

The higher stakes of a museum coupled with the public relations department's insistence upon projecting openness since the death of the famously insular Charles Cannon influenced the company's decision to turn to an outside professional for assistance in designing the Visitor Center's exhibition area. Ironically, because Pisney seemed to view the public relations department as his primary audience and drew heavily on John Harden's research in compiling his exhibit storyline, the museum narrative reflected Harden's vision of public relations as "aid[ing] the Company's nation-wide advertising program by building the company's image nationally and boosting identity of the Cannon name and its products."[21] The company's New York-based marketing department, however, had other designs on the museum, and Harden's own distinction between advertising and public relations provides insight into the reasons for their assertion of jurisdiction over the Visitor Center: "The difference [between public relations and advertising] is something like this: When you advertise you buy space or time and determine just what you want to say or do or show in the space you have bought. In public relations you put yourself into the hands of the press and

[20] Ibid.

[21] Carol Whitley and John Harden, "PR Is Doing Good, Getting Credit For It," *Cannon News,* October 25, 1971, 5.

broadcasters to talk about you and hold up a mirror to catch your image."[22] By that definition, the Visitor Center was an advertisement, and the marketing department intervened in 1973 to ensure that it reflected their rapidly shifting advertising priorities.

Fashion Right Now: Selling Cannon in the 1970s

Although the establishment of a public relations department at Cannon Mills was a direct response to the death of Charles Cannon in 1971, the passing of the company's patriarch was hardly the only historical occurrence that demanded a significant shift in Cannon Mills' messaging in the early 1970s. The viability of the company's vertically integrated textile empire depended upon its ongoing ability to profit from the name recognition it had achieved through decades of targeting "housewives" in national women's magazines such as *Ladies' Home Journal*. Cannon Mills found itself poorly positioned, both from a branding and organizational standpoint, to compete in a market in which consumers became accustomed to a broad selection of high-quality, relatively cheap products.[23] Successful brands of the Fordist era, such as Cannon Mills, fought to become household names that signified trustworthiness, reliability, and quality. Cannon Mills' advertising between the 1920s-1960s informed housewives that Cannon Mills was, because of its size and expertise, their trusted partner. The ads presented the company as committed to

[22] Ibid.

[23] Cannon Mills' business model involved putting its massive capacity to work producing a relatively small number of towel and sheet designs. When operating near maximum capacity, the company could achieve cost advantages relative to competitors. By the 1970s, however, consumers had begun to demand a greater variety of products and were less likely to exhibit brand loyalty. As was the case at other mass-market-oriented firms, Cannon Mills found that shifting its production to accommodate more and shorter runs inevitably resulted in leaving much of its capacity idled at any given time.

efficiently producing affordable household textile products of ever-increasing quality, enabling housewives to create a comfortable and fashionable modern home.

As the market for mass-produced goods became saturated, growth depended upon introducing new and improved products to entice consumers. Among the pivotal developments that enabled a revitalized neoliberal capitalism to emerge from the series of crises of the 1970s was a shift away from oversaturated and unprofitable mass markets toward an increasingly individualized, present-oriented form of consumerism that sociologist Wolfgang Streeck has termed "sociation by consumption."[24] Streeck emphasized that "it is important to bear in mind the sheer extent of the commercialization of social life that aimed to save capitalism from the specter of saturated markets after the watershed years [i.e. the late 1940s through the early 1970s]. … what firms learned in the 1970s was to put the

[24] Wolfgang Streeck, "Citizens as Customers," in *How Will Capitalism End?: Essays on a Failing System* (London: Verso, 2016), 100-01. Geographer David Harvey defined neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade." Most scholars agree that neoliberalism supplanted social democracy and Keynesianism as the dominant rationale of governance in the capitalist core nations by the late 1970s. It is distinct from the "classical liberalism," or lasiez-faire ideology that organized capitalism from mid eighteenth century through the 1930s in that it both asserts and requires a central role for state and super-state institutions (e.g. the Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank, the World Trade Organization, etc.), which must assume responsibility for creating and maintaining the social and political conditions required for markets to function in an orderly (i.e. profit-maximizing) fashion. Crucially, these include markets for goods and services such as housing and education which, in a social democratic form of governance, the state would have distributed its citizens through non-market mechanisms. Neoliberal institutions, as political theorist Wendy Brown argued, subject those under their governance to the assumption that each individual, whether as producers, consumers, or citizens, is always seeking to maximize their individual well-being. She wrote that "neoliberalism … entails a host of policies that figure and produce citizens as individual entrepreneurs and consumers whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care' – their ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions, whether as welfare recipients, medical patients, consumers of pharmaceuticals, university students, or workers in ephemeral occupations." David Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610 (2007): 22, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25097888; Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization," *Political Theory* 34, no. 6 (2006): 694, www.jstor.org/stable/20452506.

individualization of both consumers and producers at the service of commercial expansion."[25] Profit opportunities began to accrue to firms who could master a "pattern of increased production differentiation and accelerated product turnover, promoted by evermore highly targeted marketing."[26]

During the postwar era, advertisers stressed the importance of harnessing scientific expertise in consumer psychology to help segments of consumers overcome their resistance to accepting manufactured innovations. As the prominent psychologist and advertising guru, Dr. Ernest Dichter, commented in a consultation for Cannon's newly released line of colored percale sheets in 1951, "many women, and particularly many men may feel sheepish about using them. They have to be educated and accustomed to the idea of this innovation."[27] If successful, however, Dichter believed that the campaign would not only increase sales, but "establish the name of Cannon as one that stands for quality and progress."[28] The company's task was to overcome the consumer's resistance to selecting towels and sheets not on the basis of their material qualities (softness, durability, etc.), but their "eye appeal." "I accept the idea of luxury as a good theme," explained Dichter, "But – do you reassure the public sufficiently with a reason for enjoying this luxury? I'm not sure these ads give the consumer the right to buy these sheets…. I wonder if there is a guilt feeling in the woman's mind about indulging in all this luxury? If there is, you should give her absolution."[29]

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[25] Streeck, "Citizens as Customers," 100-101.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ernest Dichter Associates International, *Cannon Percale Sheets* (New York: Ernest Dichter, 1952), 3, http://www.consumerculture.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/Hagley_Dichter_BX010_261E.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 4. On Ernest Dichter's role in formalizing consumer psychology in the United States during the 1950s, see Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939-1979* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 48-78.

Dichter's recommendation that the advertiser provide themes, meanings, and even "absolution" to the consumer recalls social critic Raymond Williams's thesis that modern advertising amounts to a novel communicative form and functions similarly to a magic system.[30] As capitalism's drive for productive efficiency satisfied more basic consumer needs, advertising became ever more materially and logically embedded within capitalist society. Selling more goods required that the value of goods stem less from their objective usefulness in the tasks for which they were purportedly designed than from their function as a social signifier. Williams argued that the rise of materialism among consumers could not explain the explosion of advertising as a cultural form, for it had become impossible to separate the material qualities of branded consumer goods from the meanings they communicated. He quipped, "If we were sensibly materialist, in that part of our living in which we use things …. A washing-machine would be a useful machine for washing clothes, rather than an indication that we are forward-looking or an object of envy to our neighbors."[31] Although Williams's suggestion that advertising should be studied as "a major form of modern social communication" through which "we can understand our society itself in new ways," remains relevant, capitalist society is no longer dominated by large integrated branded manufacturers as it was in the postwar era.[32] Instead of (or perhaps, in addition to)

[30] Raymond Williams, "Advertising: The Magic System," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980).

[31] Ibid., 193.

[32] Ibid. Even large producers of twenty-first century branded consumer products such as Apple and Nike operate much more similarly to retailers than to vertically-integrated branded manufacturers like Cannon Mills. As historian Nelson Lichtenstein argued, merchant capital and finance capital have superseded manufacturing capital since the 1970s: "The commoditization of an increasing array of what were once distinctive manufactured products has weakened the market power of all manufacturers, great and small; and the growth of retail dominated global supply chains, made possible by the telecommunications revolution and the innovations in container shipping, have sent domestic American manufacturing into a tailspin, to be replaced by the contract producers who are

looking to producers to invent new products to satisfy previously non-existent needs or desires, consumers came to demand an ever-expanding array of choices for identity construction.

Rather than seeing advertising as a tool for overcoming consumer resistance to differentiation, Cannon Mills' executives found by the early 1970s that they could not differentiate quickly enough to keep pace with foreign and domestic competitors unencumbered by Cannon's mass-market-oriented production capacity. As an integrated, branded manufacturer that commanded a dominant position in the towel market along with an enviable slice of the sheet market, Cannon Mills could hardly have been more poorly situated for such a development. Low-cost imports were just part of the problem. Given the meanings already attached to Cannon Mills' products and the fact that the company's integrated operations were designed for a mass-production economy, demand for differentiation was almost certain to create opportunities for competitors at Cannon's expense. A marked shift in the company's attitude toward its consumers relative to that of the 1950s is evident in a 1971 *Cannon News* article penned by Hugh Toumey, President of Cannon Mills' New York-based marketing subsidiary:

> Cannon consumer products are now so much a part of today's fashion world that we must also be 'fashion right.' 'Fashion right' means having far more styles in our lines than manufacturing efficiencies might warrant. Equally important is having wide ranges of colors, frequent changes and shifts in

utterly dependent on the big retailers for survival." Lichtenstein,"The Return of Merchant Capitalism," 17.

> colors and combination, and having the right colors at the right time for current demand – and demand is always very current.[33]

Where Dichter's imagined consumer was a puzzle to be cracked, Toumey's had all but seized the means of signification from the producer. She (even in this enlightened age, Cannon's executives continued to gender their imagined consumer as female) no longer waited to be educated on what she should buy and how it could help her meet the duties of her natural (or aspirational) role in society – she impatiently insisted that she already knew what she wanted and what she was willing to pay for it. Catering to the desires of such consumers presented quite an ordeal for producers. "And then," wrote Toumey, "on top of all of this, we must bring our 'fashion right' products to the trade and the consumers in the most appealing manner. They must be dramatized, glamorized, and given that elusive element we call 'image'."[34]

"Fashion Right," in other words, meant "Fashion Right Now." Pisney's storyline interpreted Cannon's fashion as it did all other aspects of the company: historically developed by its past, not an eager response to the present demands of consumers. Although Cannon Mills' executives had hoped that Pisney's expertise would resolve conflicts over how to present the company's past, the marketing department had to intervene in an attempt to keep a totalizing narrative from subsuming a particular image.

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[33] Hugh Toumey, "Management Message," *Cannon News,* December 6, 1971, 1.

[34] Ibid.

A Tale of Two Storylines

Raymond Pisney delivered his storyline to Cannon Mills' management on January 23, 1973. Pisney's storyline began with the company's founding in the New South, and over the course of thirteen exhibits, marched the company triumphantly into the future (see table 1).[35] In addition to composing dozens of display panels, Pisney began each exhibit write-up by explaining to management the choices he had made and how they related to the overall narrative structure, while also providing extensive commentary and recommendations relating to staging techniques. Although there do not appear to be surviving documents detailing the internal drama over Pisney's proposed design, it is clear that his storyline did not satisfy the company's marketing department. The company completed a new storyline in April 1974, this time without consulting Pisney. It was this revised storyline that ultimately appeared in the Visitor Center when it opened in October 1974.

Table 1. Cannon Visitor Center storyline changes, January 1973 versus October 1974

Pisney's Proposed Storyline January 30, 1973		Adopted Storyline October 1974	
Exhibit	Notes	Exhibit	Notes
What is Cannon?	Audiovisual	This is Cannon	Audiovisual
James W. Cannon & "The New South"		Terry Towels: From Designer to Consumer	
Cannon Mills: The James W. Cannon Era (1887-1921)		Product Co-Ordination	
Kannapolis: From Cotton Plantation to City of Looms		Marketing and Selling	
Importance of Cotton		Products of Early Years	
Cannon Mills: A Young Company Matures		Towel Hall of Fame	

[35] In Pisney's storyline as in the revised storyline, the "Exhibition Area" of the Cannon Visitor Center refers to a series of exhibits entered from one direction and moved through sequentially. Each exhibit contained within it several "display units."

(Charles. A. Cannon 1921-1928)			
How Cannon Manufactures Household Textiles	Included Jacquard loom	Cannon People Story	Included "Career Opportunities at Cannon Mills," which was initially going to be a standalone exhibit
Marketing: Selling Cannon Household Textiles		Cannon Products as Decorative Arts	
How Cannon Mills is Organized & Directed		James W. Cannon Office	Upstairs – not part of exhibition area
People of Cannon Mills		Charles A. Cannon Office (upstairs)	Upstairs – not part of exhibition area
Careers in Textiles at Cannon		Jacquard Loom	
Household Textiles Today & Tomorrow		Cannon Gallery	Located in area where visitors assembled to wait for plant tours, showcased employee artwork
Cannon Mills Looks to the Future			

Source: Raymond F. Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline for the Cannon Visitor Center," box 65, folder 4, Cannon Mills Records; Edward Rankin to Ridenhour and Kester, memo, April 22, 1974, (hereafter "Revised Storyline") box 65, folder 4, Cannon Mills Collection.

Pisney used the first pages of his exhibit narrative to indicate what he felt to be the ideal theme, atmosphere, and audience for the Cannon Visitor Center's exhibition area. For Pisney, the theme of the museum should be one of cohesion, embedding the company of today in its sociohistorical context. His report began,

> The exhibition area of the Cannon Visitor Center is devoted to the history of the Cannon Mills Company, it endeavors to show how the company was founded, grew, and developed to become a major manufacturer of household textiles in its field in the nation. The individual exhibits establish the essential relationship between the founding and growth of the enterprise in "The New South" period with that of the present position of the Company, and they show the influence of the many approaches pioneered by Cannon in manufacturing

> and marketing on both the cotton-textile industry and consumers. It is in this context that the story of the beginning of Cannon Mills and its subsequent growth to the present day is told.[36]

Where Cannon's advertising strategy targeted the imagined purchaser of household textiles, white "housewives," rather than the much broader constituency of household textile users, Pisney believed that the museum should aim for a universal appeal. He recognized, however, the tension inherent in trying "to satisfy this diverse audience (the general public)," and therefore sought to create "dramatic but dignified exhibits" in which production value would not compromise "a high level of historical accuracy."[37] He believed that his expertise would enable him to lay out a totalizing, multi-layered, fact-based narrative that would have a cross-segment appeal.[38] In Pisney's imagination, uneducated groups, including "the curious but unspecialized traveler, the local person with time to spare, the grade school class with its teacher, high school and college groups (who could someday be prospective Cannon employees), [and] the Cannon employee who knows little or nothing about the Company's past history," would require dramatic staging techniques to ensure they learned the most

[36] Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline," i.

[37] Ibid., ii-iii.

[38] By totalizing, I mean that Pisney's museum professed to have considered the company's history from all possible angles, producing a corporate corollary (albeit an inverted one) to what Benedict Anderson termed "official nationalism." Writing in reference to the emergence of nationalism within European empires, Anderson defined "official nationalism" as the "willed merger of nation and dynastic empire." Where rising national consciousness during the mid-nineteenth century forced dynastic rulers to assert their connectedness with their subjects (linguistically, culturally, etc.), Pisney's museum attempted to prove a unity between Cannon Mills of the mid-1970s and the bygone Cannon family dynasty. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 86.

important facts about "how the company was founded, grew, and developed to become a major manufacturer of cotton-textile products in its field in the nation."[39]

Pisney deployed what anthropologists Richard Handler and Eric Gable have referred to as "just-the-facts history," but he attempted to layer facts in such a way that he could impress a more sophisticated visitor without causing his imagined uneducated constituencies to lose sight of the story of Cannon Mills.[40] This more sophisticated imagined constituency within the general public included "the thoughtful and intelligent person with a considerable knowledge of history or textile science, corporate executives and employees of other cotton-textile manufacturers and marketing agencies, the professional textile technologist or scientist, the historian, the antiquarian, and the museum official with a critical eye for mis-information, unauthentic details, and inferior exhibits."[41] Pisney's supposedly critical discourse with this class of sophisticated visitors was factual rather than historiographical in nature. Rather than engaging with other possible interpretations of the story of Cannon Mills, Pisney's narrative rested upon the idea that the facts told the story rather than provided the historian with a framework to construct a story.[42]

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[39] Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline," ii-iii.

[40] Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 78-101. Handler and Gable noted that interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg used a discourse of factual precision to project their command of the subject matter while also keeping the discourse of tours away from "touchy" or "embarrassing" topics such as miscegenation.

[41] Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline," iii.

[42] Handler and Gable point to two coexistent but contradictory views of how history changes that are tacitly present in museums. The "Constructionist" theory of history asserts that creating historical narratives requires choices on the part of historian(s), and although the historian will always leave his or her mark on the history he or she constructs, an infinite array of facts cannot be brought to order without construction on the part of historians. "Objectivism" or "realism," which appeared more frequently in their ethnographic research among both visitors and museum staff, asserts that "The work of historians is to discover more and better facts in order to render the histories they write ever

Pisney proposed that the exhibit area begin with a five-minute audiovisual presentation entitled "What is Cannon?", which would "include (in combination) dramatic lighting effects, slides, films, lighted panels, sound tracks for narration and special effects."[43] Pisney answered the question thusly: "Cannon Mills Company is a product of its area, of its geography, of its natural resources, and of its people." To know the company of today, Pisney asserted, required that one ask "BUT, WHERE DID ALL OF THIS BEGIN? Who was involved in the founding of Cannon Mills? When was the company established? Why was the company founded? And, How has the enterprise developed and expanded over the years to become a totally integrated manufacturer of textiles? TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS, WE MUST LOOK INTO HISTORY."[44]

Although the Visitor Center ultimately followed Pisney's suggestion to begin the exhibits area with an audiovisual presentation, rather than asking "What is Cannon?" the exhibit affirmed "This is Cannon."[45] It addressed the question "What is Cannon Mills," but kept its answers rooted firmly in the present. Cannon was, according to the outline of the updated exhibits storyline:

> People and their skills – wages, salaries benefits, taxes.
>
> Textile machines and modern technology.
>
> Products – thousands of styles, colors and sizes.

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more faithful to the reality of the past." See Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 59-60.

[43] Ibid., What is Cannon?, 1. With the exception of the introduction, the pagination scheme of Pisney's document begins at 1 for each section.

[44] Ibid., 3.

[45] Edward Rankin to Ridenhour and Kester, memo, April 22, 1974, (hereafter "Revised Storyline") box 65, folder 4, Cannon Mills Collection.

Cannon as the leader in the American textile industry.

Contributions made by the textile industry.[46]

Pisney's exhibits followed a temporal progression from the founding of the company back to the present, or as historian Tony Bennett put it, "organized walking through evolutionary time."[47] In concert with the emergence of evolution-based classificatory systems in the biological and social sciences during the last decades of the nineteenth century, "the visitor's pathway through most museums came to be governed by the irreversible succession of evolutionary series."[48] Having learned "What is Cannon?", visitors would proceed from the triumphant present back to the beginning of the evolutionary narrative, where they would be greeted by "a curved wall (to appropriate scale) which will be covered by a neutral color, will be bathed in soft light, and will carry the caption in large letters – "James W. Cannon and 'The New South.'"[49] Pisney added that "a framed oil portrait (color) of James W. Cannon will hang in the center of this wall and will be dramatically lighted as the only object displayed."

Pisney selected the same starting point for the company's narrative that John Harden used in his lengthy company history published in *Cannon News* in January 1972. Both men drew liberally from the "Great Man" theory of history. As Harden put it, "Like most big and important enterprises, and accomplishments, [sic] Cannon Mills Company came into being as an idea in the mind of one man. The start was in 1887. The idea and the start were the result of an economic problem of that day, a cotton field, and a young man's idea for helping other

[46] Ibid.

[47] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 186.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline," James W. Cannon & "The New South", 1.

people."[50] Recognizing the more interactive nature of a museum exhibit, Pisney anticipated that visitors might be curious as to the history of the Great Man at the center of the Cannon Mills story. He suggested that "In order to satisfy public curiosity as to where the Cannon family originated and how they came to settle in this area, the combination of a wall map, textblocks and graphics will be used."[51] Pisney did not indicate his sourcing for the Cannon's family history, so it is difficult to say whether including an artist's rendition of "the family's life in Europe (perhaps an eighteenth-century weaver at work)" was more than poetic license. It is telling, however, that he suggested depicting the Cannons as descended from a tradition of independent, self-sufficient artisans to emphasize their connection to their workers given that, as historian E. P. Thompson famously demonstrated, many English weavers fiercely resisted the rise of the factory system and the intrusions of market logic into relations of production based upon custom and enshrined in law.[52]

Pisney justified the power which Cannon family and their company came to wield in Kannapolis in the subtext in his discussion of their European origin but dispensed with allusions upon reaching the company's New South origins. He appealed to what was by then a discredited New South trope in which southern elites and poor southern whites were of the same "stock" and subject to common threats, but without the explicit references to race that had so preoccupied New South boosters.[53] Pisney grounded Cannon Mills' paternalism in a

[50] John Harden, "Cannon Mills Started in Eighty-Seven," *Cannon News*, January 3, 1972, 1.

[51] Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline," James W. Cannon & "The New South," 2.

[52] Thompson discussed the historically developed social, economic, cultural, and political context of the Luddite uprisings in England during the 1810s in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 485-602.

[53] Woodward, *Origins*, 222. As Woodward noted, southern mill owners and fellow boosters well into the twentieth century referred to the mills as philanthropic initiatives meant to save "the necessitous masses of the poor whites."

deracialized and substantially degendered history of rational and enlightened self-interest freely exercised by the company and its workers. The exhibit was to follow James Cannon from his 1852 birth on a Mecklenburg County farm through to his early career as a merchant. Emphasizing Cannon's ethic of hard work and self-improvement, Pisney noted that Cannon's business career started at age 13 at the Concord General Store, where he worked "for the first six months for 'bed and board'" before going on to become, by the 1870s, a "full partner in the business."[54] Pisney wrote a text block explaining that "Following the War between the States, the South remained almost totally agrarian, thousands were jobless, while countless others managed to eke out a bare subsistence from small and nonproductive farms."[55] James Cannon served these "poverty ridden farmers," who were forced to "… pay high prices for commodities, particularly cloth that had been manufactured out of raw cotton which they had previously sold at a mere pittance per pound."[56]

Thus, as the title of the final text block of the section put it, "An Idea [was] Born." James Cannon's idea combined a discourse of southern redemption with one of national efficiency (Pisney later conceded that James Cannon was not the first man to give birth to such an idea). Pisney wrote that "since cotton was the major money crop of the South, and since the region desperately needed a payroll industry, James Cannon reasoned that the two could be combined." James Cannon's idea, then, was based upon both an enlightened concern for emancipating worthy people from oppression and an appeal to the possibility for increased efficiency. The essence of business-progressive, or what came to be known as

[54] Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline," James W. Cannon & "The New South," 4.

[55] Ibid. Southerners used (and some still use) the term "The War between the States" rather than "The Civil War" to suggest that the Confederate States of America was formed in defense of the principle of states' rights.

[56] Ibid.

"free-enterprise," ideology depends upon the inseparability of the interest of businesses and the interest of the nation (or the nation as mediated through the region, in the case of the New South).[57] Northern Progressives during the 1890s-1910s tended to promote both government regulation and organized labor as necessary checks on a new kind of massive, unaccountable corporation. By the 1920s, the strain of business progressivism long evident in the rhetoric of southern textile mill owners began to coalesce as a new common sense that would inform a decades-long campaign against the New Deal and the idea of attempting to impose progress from without. As historian Lawrence Glickman noted, the idea of "free enterprise" became stripped of its labor-republican origins and was put to work in opposition to forces of working people and government that "constrained business creativity, which was the engine not only of economic growth but of social progress."[58]

Having covered the company's pre-history and founding, Pisney's next exhibit, "Cannon Mills: The James W. Cannon Era," "[began] to tell the actual story of the antecedents to the present-day Cannon Mills company."[59] Like the Colonial Williamsburg guides who served as Handler and Gable's ethnographic subjects in *The Old History in a New Museum* (1997), Pisney made a point of including exact numerical figures whenever practical.[60] With no frame of reference, it would have been difficult for a visitor to know

[57] The New South ideology insisted that the region's development, led by progressive-minded white southern men, would bring the South back into harmony with the rest of the nation.

[58] Lawrence B. Glickman, *Free Enterprise: An American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 72. "Labor republicanism" refers to the idea that both slavery and widespread wage labor which limited the ability of small craftsmen and entrepreneurs to flourish were antithetical to social flourishing. The classic work on labor republicanism is Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[59] Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline," Cannon Mills: The James W. Cannon Era, 1.

[60] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum,* 78.

what to make of the fact that James Cannon had "only $12,000 to invest," but Pisney seems to have included facts not to aid visitors in historical thinking, but to signify that the data was authentic and that founding the company was a complex undertaking.[61] Pisney proposed including such documents as the company's original stockholder list in order to "indicate the complexity of the capital situation and provide visitors with some idea of the support of many people required to begin the company."[62] His text block, "The First Mill," was similarly attentive to providing an appreciation of the details that a great man had to master in order to bring a seemingly simple idea to fruition: "Construction was started in the fall of 1877 on a yarn mill. The structure was two-stories measuring 76' x 156' and was originally equipped with a 150 H.P. [horsepower] Steam Engine that furnished power for over 4,000 spindles, 32 cards and 130 looms."[63] Pisney suggested that an accompanying drawing or scale-model "of the original mill in cut-away should be considered to convey to visitors a full appreciation of the complexity of the operation."[64]

Pisney acknowledged, however, that too many facts about certain aspects of Cannon Mills could distract from the story. Referring to the next section, "Kannapolis: From Cotton Plantation to City of Looms," he wrote that "probably in no other section of the exhibits storyline should a greater degree of selectivity be exercised."[65] He attributed the need for selectivity not to the lawsuits over racial discrimination in housing, Ralph Nader's recent documentary, nor the company's continuing efforts to block the expansion of higher-wage

[61] Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline," Cannon Mills: The James W. Cannon Era, 3.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., 3.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., Kannapolis, 1.

industries in Cabarrus County, but to a presumed lack of interest among guests. He posed the rhetorical question:

> For instance, is it really necessary to get terribly involved in a discussion of how the community is organized, how urban services are provided and administered, or many of the subjects related to these? Probably all a typical visitor will want to know is "How did Kannapolis get its name?" "How did Kannapolis acquire its distinctive architecture? (since the visitor has seen this on his or her way into the business district of the city)?" "What does the present-day city of Kannapolis comprise?" And, "What sort of relationship exists (today) between Cannon Mills Company and Kannapolis?" This is probably all the subject matter a typical visitor will have any interest in or will have time to assimilate.[66]

Cannon Mills ultimately eschewed Pisney's plan to organize a progressive historical narrative in the Visitor Center. Instead of transporting visitors back to the dawn of the New South, the first exhibit deposited them at a scene reminiscent of the modern department store. Rather than beginning in the mind of James Cannon, the company emphasized that the towel's journey to the consumer began with its designer. It featured a "massed display of current and representative samples of terry towels followed by the step-by-step process by which one or more Cannon towels are created."[67]

The Visitor Center's consumerist interpretation saw history as a mine for anecdotal information that could potentially add value to the products on display by imbuing them with

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

differentiating characteristics not immediately evident in their material qualities. In some cases, this meant mining Pisney's research. For instance, Pisney devoted significant space in his "Importance of Cotton" exhibit to the story of "how cotton-textiles have contributed to civilization and progress throughout history."[68] Beginning with an orientalist nod to the "mystery" of cotton's origins, he noted that "around 5,000 B.C., cotton appeared in the Indus Valley of India" and that "the natives in the Nile Valley in Ancient Egypt were spinning and weaving cloth at about the same time," before going on to narrate its progression along with Western Civilization to the American South.[69] The revised outline from April 1974 noted that some of Pisney's research could be incorporated into a "possible footnote on how ancient terry fabric actually is … perhaps using the sample of the existing South American terry construction."[70] But unlike Pisney, who attempted to wrap every piece of his design into a story of continual progress, the marketing department left it to the consumer to make their own sense of the fact that terry fabric is very old (or to ignore it altogether).[71]

Although the Cannon Visitor Center rejected Pisney's modernist arrangement of exhibits into a temporal progress narrative, the Visitor Center's exhibition area did adopt a kind of organized walking scheme (see figure 4.1). Instead of attempting to communicate the unity of Cannon Mills' present and future with James Cannon's original vision, the Visitor

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[68] Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline," Importance of Cotton, 1.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Rankin to Ridenhour and Kester, "Revised Storyline," 1.

[71] One might usefully consider these connected yet distinct usages of the past as an example of what literary theorist Fredric Jameson termed "historicism effac[ing] history." Pisney's description in this model is "history" – it attempted to give meaning to the South American terry fabric by linking it to the historical narrative of Cannon Mills. The marketing department reduced the artifacts to referents, consistent with what Jameson described as the phenomenon of postmodern cultural productions to engage in "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion… ." See Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (1984): 65-66.

Center unified designer and consumer. Where Pisney's final exhibit, "Cannon Mills Looks to the Future," asked the visitor to consider the distant future of the company and its people, the Visitor Center instead asked the consumer to consider the immediate future of their own bedroom. Its final exhibit, "Cannon Products as Decorative Arts" featured a model bedroom decked out in coordinated Cannon Mills products.[72]

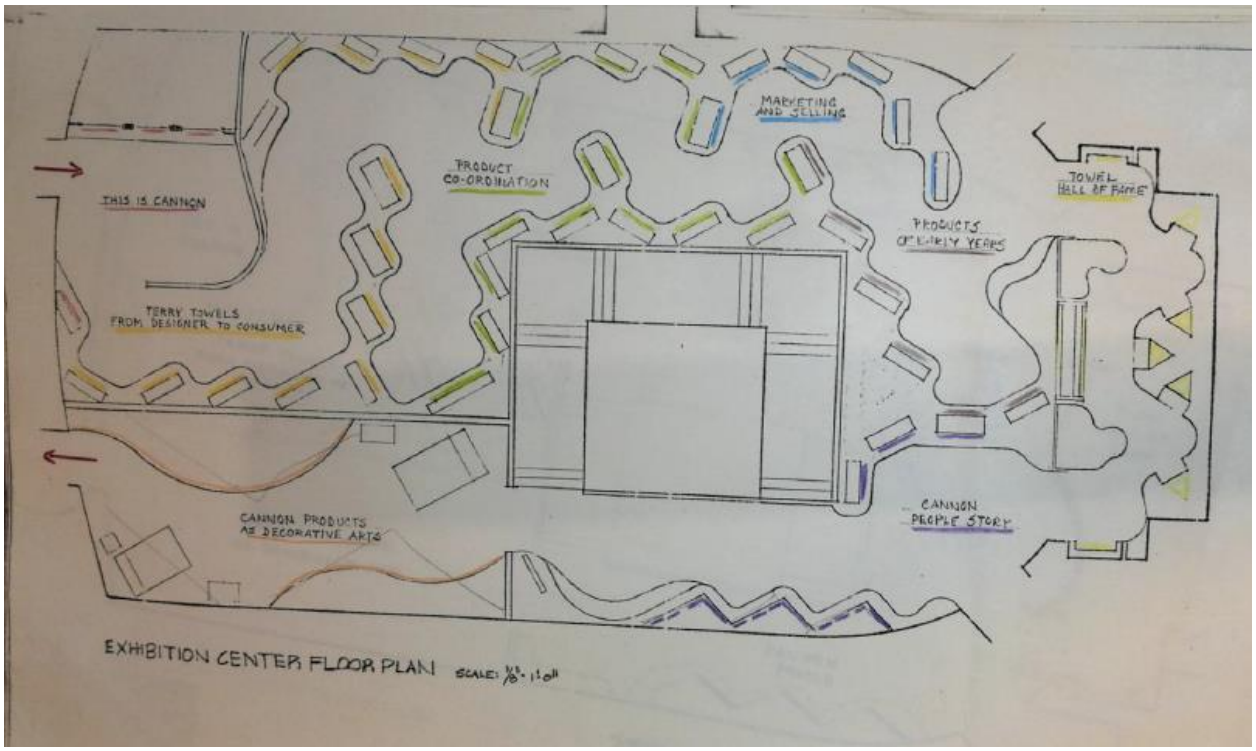

Figure 4.1. 1974 Floorplan of the Cannon Visitor Center Exhibition Area. "Exhibition Center Floor Plan," 1974. Box 65, folder 3, Cannon Mills Collection.

Instead of locating James Cannon at the beginning of the narrative, the company placed both Cannon patriarchs above it. Ed Rankin explained in a press release issued shortly before the Visitor Center opened to the public that "The second floor of the Cannon Visitor Center features the restored offices of the company's founder, James W. Cannon, and the

[72] Rankin to Ridenhour and Kester, "Revised Storyline," 1.

company's chief executive for over 50 years, Charles Cannon." [73] Rankin continued, "The offices are the result of considerable historic research. Visitors will step back into different time periods when they enter these offices." But unlike in Pisney's storyline, the Visitor Center made no effort to guide visitors into the present.

Unlike the marketing department-designed 1971 museum, workers and production played more than a bit part in the Visitor Center exhibits. However, where Pisney presented workers as fulfilling a social role within the Cannon Mills hierarchy, the Visitor Center's workers were seemingly rugged individualists. Pisney's storyline emphasized semi-anonymous workers' satisfaction with a whole way of life. His proposed text block titles for the "People of Cannon Mills" exhibit included "The Production Worker," "Factory Life," "Domestic Life," "Social and Religious Life," "Leisure Time Activities," Public Service (Honors and Awards)," "Employees in Retirement," and "The Loyalty Club."[74] In the updated storyline, Ed Rankin noted that the exhibition area would "give strong emphasis to encouragement of employees for additional education and self-improvement, as well as a look ahead at modern textile technology."[75] Among the "possible slogans or language to be used" in the "Career Opportunities at Cannon Mills" exhibit, which was later rolled into the "Cannon People Story," were:

Join the leader in textile production and sales

Be a pro – Join the Cannon Team

There's a promising future with Cannon

[73] Edward Rankin, Cannon Mills Company press release, October 1, 1974, box 65, folder 4, Cannon Mills Collection.

[74] Pisney, "Exhibits Storyline," People of Cannon Mills – 1-2.

[75] Rankin to Ridenhour and Kester, "Revised Storyline," 3.

Like a challenge? Learn a new skill with Cannon

You can qualify for a new job and a new career with Cannon. Apply today.

Why play in the minor leagues? Join the pros at Cannon, a Major Leaguer in Textiles.[76]

The Visitor Center's attempt to speak to individual careerists ran into the reality of factory work, which requires the sublimation of the individual will to the rhythms of the machine.[77] The contradiction is best illustrated by two museum display units featured in the Visitor Center that were installed in the years following its 1974 opening. Tellingly, "A Day in the Life of a Cannon Salesman" appeared not in the "Cannon People Story" exhibit, but in "Marketing and Selling" (figure 4.2). *Cannon News* reported that the seven pictures of "Cannon salesman Bob Dellinger of the Miami office …. give viewers a good idea of what a salesman's job is really like."[78] The photographs were of different sizes and orientation, and while they adhered to a general design structure, their spacing was nonetheless irregular. Like a white-collar salesman's day, there are large swaths of unused space, punctuated with intense periods of labor, much of it of the affective variety (sales calls, visiting retailers, inspecting showrooms, etc.), with some office work mixed in for good measure.[79] There is no narrative structure – the point of the display was to demonstrate the unpredictable variety of tasks that a salesman undertakes.

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[76] Ibid.

[77] All work is at least partially dependent upon requirements not of the workers' choosing, but the spatial organization of the factory provides few opportunities for downtime.

[78] "Visitor Center Section on Merchandising Updated," *Cannon News,* December 13, 1976.

[79] Affective labor is work undertaken to produce emotional experiences in others – to put them at ease, to make them nervous, to make them feel valued, to make them feel angry, etc. The salesman, with his masculine autonomy, exudes accountability and a willingness to "go to bat" for his customer. See Michael Hardt, "Affective Labor," *boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999), www.jstor.org/stable/303793.

By contrast, “The Weaver,” which profiled a worker named Cathy Laws, was reminiscent of William Hogarth’s 1747 series of engravings, *Industry and Idleness*.[80] Like a factory worker’s day in comparison to a salesman’s, the display featuring Laws was more tightly economized (figure 4.3). While Cannon Mills did not attempt to take credit for the salesman’s expertise–he presumably came to the company white, male, and competent in the particular kind of affective labor demanded by his job–Laws’s progress narrative began the day she showed up at the hiring office. The exhibit depicted her twelve-week company-sponsored training program. She learned to tie a weaver’s knot, to repair a breaking end, and (although it is unstated) to perform the emotional labor necessary to acclimate herself to the repetitive rigors of life on the factory floor. Having been invested with skill, Laws had to demonstrate her worthiness. The last photograph depicted her alone at her loom, with the caption asking “Can I make production?” Having successfully completed her training, the final photograph showed Laws standing before a retail display and proudly gesturing to the wall of Cannon products behind her. The caption read: “Look what I helped make!”[81]

[80] Sean Shesgreen, "Hogarth's Industry and Idleness: A Reading," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 9, no. 4 (1976), https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2737796. The comparison should not be pushed too far and by no means accounts for the role of gender. Hogarth’s engravings begin with two apprentices, the industrious Francis Goodchild and the idle Tom Idle, at their looms. Goodchild’s clean living and industriousness is ultimately rewarded with him becoming the Lord Mayor of London in the twelfth and final engraving. Idle goes on to a life of crime and keeps the company of prostitutes. He is brought before his former associate, by then an alderman, in the tenth engraving and executed at Tyburn in the eleventh. Although the form is reminiscent of a Hogarthian progress, unlike Francis Goodchild, Laws’s progress does not take her to a life of riches and power. Instead, she is happy that Cannon Mills gave her the opportunity to become a valuable producer of home textile products.

[81] “Textile Occupations to be Featured,” *Cannon News*, February 12, 1979.

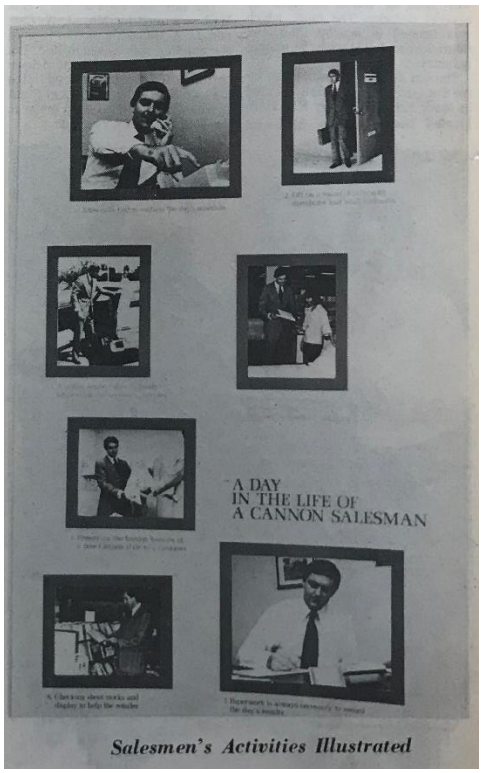

Figure 4.2. "A Day in the Life of a Cannon Salesman." *Cannon News*, December 13, 1976.

Figure 4.3. Cathy Laws, "The Weaver" *Cannon News*, February 12, 1976.

Conclusion

As the officers and directors of the Kannapolis Merchants Association finished their steaks at a luncheon held in the Directors' Room of the Cannon Memorial YMCA in Kannapolis on the afternoon of October 10, 1974, Don Holt made his way to the lectern to deliver some remarks about the cause for the afternoon's festivities: the opening of the exhibition area of the Cannon Visitor Center. He informed his guests, all of whom rented their downtown Kannapolis commercial space from Cannon Mills, that "For more than a year, we have been planning, renovating and constructing a new Cannon Visitor Center in downtown Kannapolis." With a nod to the problem of urban blight (albeit, a nod that

absolved Cannon Mills of any responsibility for the situation), Holt reminded the audience that "this is the former location of the old Sewanee theater which has gone the way of many downtown movie houses."[82] Foreshadowing the claims of subsequent industrial heritage sites to serve as catalysts for the development of local tourist and service economies, Holt made sure to point out that, "in terms of reaching passing tourists, we could have located the Visitor Center and textile exhibition off of I-85. Or, perhaps, along U.S. 29-A. However, I firmly believed that this new attraction should be located squarely in the middle of downtown Kannapolis – and that is where it is."

Emphasizing his commitment to ensuring the embeddedness of Cannon Mills within Kannapolis (and Kannapolis within the southern political economy), Holt continued "I hope that each of you will realize the benefits which may derived from serving the traffic and the people who will be coming to Kannapolis to visit the Cannon Textile Exhibition …. Many of them will want to eat a snack, perhaps a meal, will linger in the downtown area if there is something here to attract them." "But," he concluded "you are the experts on retailing selling [sic] – not me – so I simply want to tell you how pleased we are to join you as a full partner in promoting the growth and development of the downtown business district."[83]

Questions of embeddedness and expertise proved central in the company's struggle to, as Holt put it, "present the story of Cannon Mills Company, its people and its products" through the Cannon Visitor Center exhibition area.[84] And it was a struggle. When Cannon's marketing department designed a museum in the basement of the company's headquarters in

[82] Don Holt, "Remarks for Officers and Directors of Kannapolis Merchants Association" (Kannapolis, NC, October 10, 1974), box 65, folder 4, Cannon Mills Collection.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

1971, the resulting space was reminiscent of a showroom, lacking a coherent a historical narrative. The decision to create a new offsite museum in downtown Kannapolis gave the company an opportunity to incorporate the expertise of a museum professional who could help the weave Cannon Mills' story into the spatial design of the Visitor Center's exhibition area. The goal, as public relations director Edward Rankin explained when the company began putting the project into motion in August 1972, was to create "an exhibition area which will contain elements of both a museum and an exhibition or show. Its purpose will be to provide information which will be educational, stimulating and interesting to visitors and guests."[85]

The soft opening of the Visitor Center began just weeks before the November 20, 1974, National Labor Relations Board election and the company used the opportunity to shore up support among its base of older white voters. In addition to offering workers special previews in the month of October, the fanfare surrounding its grand opening provided the company an opportunity to flex its continuing clout as a force in North Carolina politics. Pat Holshouser, the first lady of North Carolina, told the company following her visit "Since North Carolina is the leader in the nation in textiles, I feel it is essential that more children, as well as adults, see the complex system involved in making our linens."[86] Yet the story of the Visitor Center's conception reflected, no less than the worker activism, a company uneasily attempting to use a version of a contested past to stake out a place for itself in the future. "It is in the interest of all of us to work together to keep Cannon Mills operating successfully. The economic future for all of us depends upon it," wrote Don Holt in an anti-union letter to

[85] Edward Rankin, "Visitors Center Work Underway," *Cannon News*, August 7, 1972, 1.

[86] "Visitor Center Receives Praise," *Cannon News*, November 4, 1974, 1.

workers. Holt's narrative did not satisfy one Cannon Mills worker, who returned an annotated copy of the letter to his boss. Beside Holt's assertion, he wrote "and it is constitutionally right for the working man to have a SAY SO about his economic future."[87] Although he would have had no way of knowing the internal struggle managers had waged over the Visitor Center, his insight into the conflicts within the firm also proved prescient. In response to Holt's claim that, unlike the union, "Cannon is not run by outside interests [and] bosses who live in New York or Chicago or elsewhere. Cannon is managed by local people, most of whom have grown up in North Carolina," the worker drew an arrow pointing to the address listed at the bottom of the company letterhead, Selling Agents, Cannon Mills, Inc., 1273 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. / 10020," along with the caption "Note the address."[88]

[87] Don Holt and anonymous Cannon Mills Worker, "Letter to Cannon People," Nov 4, 1974, box 80, folder 3, Cannon Mills Collection.

[88] Ibid.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

"You want to know what I like and what makes me happy?" he said as we stood on the bridge. "Just having these fish makes me happy. Every one is alive because of me."[1]

– David Murdock to Frank Bruni
New York Times Magazine, *March 3, 2011*

In the aftermath of the Pillowtex shutdown in 2003, Kannapolis's leaders saw the past as perhaps the only asset that could help land the town's next corporate patriarch to fill the void left by Cannon Mills. "We really have a story to tell as a community," Jennifer Woodford, Kannapolis Communications Director, told City Council members in July of 2004.[2] Like Raymond Pisney's unimplemented plan for the Cannon Visitor Center, their public relations campaign, told through advertisements in business periodicals, narrativized Kannapolis's story. Rather than stabilizing the present by linking it to a story of progressive, guided improvement, however, Woodford's present and future were supine and inert. The story awaited the great man willing to inherit the burden of the town's storied but tragic history – and, like James Cannon before him, shape the future to his vision. In another perhaps unwitting nod to Cannon Mills' public relations strategies of old, the *Observer* reported that "they also want to offer tours of the city to prospective investors and others

[1] Frank Bruni, "The Billionaire Who Is Planning His 125th Birthday," *New York Times Magazine*, March 3, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/06/magazine/06murdock-t.html.

[2] Karen Cimino, "Kannapolis Eager to Tell Its Economic Story to Nation," *Charlotte Observer*, July 15, 2004, NewsBank North Carolina.

interested in its story." Mike Legg, then-interim City Manager, told the paper that "the light is shining bright on Kannapolis right now. We need to jump on this."[3]

Into that light swooped billionaire investor David Murdock. It was not Murdock's first high-profile foray into Kannapolis. In 1982, he purchased a beleaguered Cannon Mills Company, promising to make the firm the largest and most efficient textile manufacturer in the world.[4] Murdock used his immense wealth to sell himself as a worthy inheritor of the once-powerful Cannon family, capable of getting things done in a way that Holt and subsequent executives of the interregnum period of 1971-1982 could not. His signature project involved redeveloping an area of the city's downtown into what he christened "Cannon Village," a few blocks of new downtown retail space built in the Williamsburg style that had been inaugurated by Charles Cannon fifty years earlier.[5] As a piece of promotional literature explained, "Today's Kannapolis and the development of Cannon Village might well be called a tribute to the Cannon family, for it was they who decided to stake the future on the outcome of the dream of turning a cotton field into a textile giant, and it was their ingenuity that accomplished it. Likewise, that same ingenuity will be reflected in the future of Kannapolis. Cannon Village will be a revelation of the heritage which will always be cherished, and the vision of what is yet to be achieved."[6] Lest it be lost on anyone who was responsible for the "vision of what is yet to be achieved," the pamphlet extended "special thanks to the vision and determination of David H. Murdock."[7]

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Vanderburg, *Cannon Mills and Kannapolis*, 195.

[5] Ibid., 196.

[6] *Kannapolis: The Future*, (Kannapolis, NC: Cannon Mills Company, 1984), n.p.

[7] Ibid.

Many workers came to resent Murdock for employing paternalist rhetoric while simultaneously engaging in what many felt to be callous layoffs and pay cuts. As one retiree put it, "Mr. Charlie Cannon, why's he's the one who hired me. A good man, you could count on him. But you can't never tell what that man (Murdock) is gonna do."[8] Dissatisfaction with the Murdock regime resulted in an organizing effort with the American Clothing and Textile Workers' Union in 1985 that culminated in the company's second-ever National Labor Relations Board election. Cannon Mills conducted an ardent anti-union campaign in which management combined American flag-draped protectionist rhetoric with thinly veiled threats as to what would befall workers and their town if they allowed a so-called third party to come between themselves and a company that represented their only hope of keeping their jobs.[9]

So pervasive was workers' disdain for Murdock, however, that the company found itself attempting to convince employees that a vote against the union need not be seen as a vote for Murdock. *Cannon News* published a letter-to-the-editor in which one worker admonished those whose contempt for Murdock supposedly blinded them to their duty to their fellow workers to ensure the survival of their company and community: "What are those who wanted a union so bad going to say when the plant has to close. 'Boy, did we show David Murdock we could beat him. Now I wish I could find a job somewhere close by Kannapolis."[10] In an effort to dissuade black workers, the crucial constituency in the Textile Workers' Union of America's strong performance in 1974, *Cannon News* and the *Daily*

[8] John Hackman, "Company Loosens Paternalistic Ties to Town It Sired," *Charlotte Observer*, March 20, 1983, NewsBank North Carolina.

[9] Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door*, 118-22.

[10] Jerry Morris, letter to the editor, *Cannon News*, October 2, 1985, 3.

Independent published a letter from Bishop W. T. Bowens, founder of Kannapolis's Mt. Calvary Church of God, who proclaimed that "Mr. Murdock is a strong man … [ellipses his] a dreamer who fulfills his dreams. We must never forget that strong leaders can dream and make their dreams fulfilled…. I appeal to all Cannon employees to support David H. Murdock. Give him a chance to fulfill his dreams for Cannon and for you."[11]

Just weeks after 64 percent of Cannon Mills' workforce voted to give their new patriarch that chance, Murdock announced that he was selling the firm to longtime rival Fieldcrest Mills.[12] Although many in town hoped they had seen the last of him, Murdock retained most of Cannon Mills' sizable real estate portfolio in the sale. In addition, he maintained the right to manage the firm's pension fund, which a union-sponsored investigation revealed Murdock had used as a vehicle for financing risky corporate raiding schemes.[13] In 1986, he converted the pension fund into annuities with the Los Angeles-based Executive Life Insurance Company, which in 1990 became among the highest-profile casualties of the junk bond crisis.[14] Its bankruptcy resulted in Cannon's retirees absorbing reductions of close to 30 percent in their monthly payments, which even before the devaluation only amounted for most production workers to around $75 in 2019 inflation-

[11] Bishop W. T. Bowens, advertisement, *Cannon News*, October 2, 1985, 3. The advertisement included a note indicating that "This letter appeared as a paid advertisement in the *Daily Independent*, Kannapolis."

[12] Vanderburg, *Cannon Mills and Kannapolis,* 197.

[13] Ibid., 199. Corporate raiding refers to the practice of an outside investor buying up shares of a target company's stock. In many cases, their goal is not to actually acquire a controlling stake in the company, but to push management to drive up the stock price by buying up shares of the company so that shareholders cannot sell them to the corporate raider. The effect is to drive up the stock price, and the corporate raider can sell his shares back at a premium. The risk, however, is that management might not think the company is worth saving and acquiesce to the hostile takeover, leaving the corporate raider with a controlling stake of a company he probably did not want to own in the first place.

[14] Nancy Peckenham, "Out in the Cold at Cannon Mills," *Nation*, September 16, 1991.

adjusted dollars.[15] Retiree Nannie Sue Garner told the *Nation* in 1991, "I only draw $29.64 [a month]. Murdock should be made to pay this pension back …. But one thing's for sure, when he faces God he will answer for a great deal and he can't take a dime with him."[16]

Although he had never really left, Murdock's high-profile reemergence in Kannapolis began in December 2004 when he purchased the mill from the city at auction for $6.4 million.[17] He assured the *Charlotte Observer* that he was on a mission of mercy: "I'm not a money-hungry man. I guess I satisfied that hunger quite a few years ago. My desire is to do things that are good for mankind."[18] In September 2005, every household in Kannapolis received an invitation to a ceremony at which Murdock and University of North Carolina System President, Molly Broad, announced plans for what they claimed would become the largest biotechnology complex in the nation: the North Carolina Research Campus. Tellingly, it fell to the City of Kannapolis to pay the $7,000 cost of creating and mailing the invitations.[19] Murdock claimed that the Research Campus would directly employ between 8,000-9,000 people, a figure that some experts familiar with industry dynamics immediately decried as fanciful. Due to what economists refer to as "network effects," growth in the biotechnology research sector tends to take place at existing centers rather than seeking out new, potentially cheaper locales.[20] Economist Joseph Cortright, who had recently coauthored

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[15] Vanderburg, *Cannon Mills and Kannapolis*, 199.

[16] Peckenham, "Out in the Cold at Cannon Mills," 300.

[17] Vanderburg, *Cannon Mills and Kannapolis*, 299.

[18] Adam Bell, "Billionaire on a Mission," *Charlotte Observer*, September 11, 2005, NewsBank North Carolina.

[19] April Bethea, "Briefs," *Charlotte Observer*, September 9, 2005, NewsBank North Carolina.

[20] In industrial production, certain kinds of non-capital-intensive industrial manufacturing operations can be easily induced to move to new locales with the prospect of cheaper production costs (textiles being a prime example of these so-called footloose industries). Conversely, capital intensive industries and those that are highly dependent upon network effects become highly resistant to

a Brookings Institution report on the subject, put Kannapolis's situation bluntly in a 2005 *Charlotte Observer* article (which remains one of the most critical pieces to appear since the Research Campus's founding): "If they are putting their hopes on biotech, it's like leaving the landing lights on for Amelia Earhart, because it's not coming."[21]

Murdock's narrative of transformation has been crucial to securing $269 million in direct public funding as of 2019.[22] The City of Kannapolis and Cabarrus County have likewise spent lavishly to assure its success. "This is a success story in the making," City Manager Mike Legg assured readers of *Public Management*, "Just when you think your back's against the wall, circumstances can change – not by magic but by fresh thinking and smart action."[23] As the inheritor to a disaster, Murdock has positioned his venture as Kannapolis's last, best hope. As an added bonus, Kannapolis's sizable population of poor and aging people, Murdock believed, would provide a convenient and easily accessible pool of test subjects for such studies as the Measurement to Understand the Reclassification of Disease Of Cabarrus/Kannapolis, a confusing assemblage of words selected less for their

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incentives to relocate once entrenched in a certain area. This paradigm corresponds to scientific research as well. Some kinds of research are, for a variety of reasons, more footloose than others (although, as with industrial production, technological innovation can make it possible to chip away at networks that would have once needed to be entirely located in a particular place). Because of the power of network effects in biotechnology research, research groups are typically willing to pay more money to rent lab space in established research centers in order to gain access to a network of fellow research groups and opportunities for commercializing research (much of which is publicly funded) into profit-making ventures. See Joseph Cortright and Heike Mayer, *Signs of Life: The Growth of Biotechnology Centers in the U.S.* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2002), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/biotech.pdf.

[21] Adam Bell, "Barriers to Biotech," *Charlotte Observer*, October 16, 2005, NewsBank North Carolina.

[22] Shannon Cuthrell, "Brick by Brick," *Business North Carolina*, no. 1 (January 2020): 241. Most of the Research Campus's state funding comes through fees paid by the UNC System and its affiliated institutions to rent lab space.

[23] Mike Legg, "From Textile to Biotech," *Public Management* 92, no. 1 (2010): 14.

felicity in describing the study's scientific aim than for the fact that they could be acronymized as: MURDOCK. In exchange for signing over the permanent rights to their genome, participants received a $10 Wal-Mart gift card and a t-shirt.[24]

The roll-out of the Research Campus, like the aftermath of Charles Cannon's death, represented a crystalizing moment for interpretations of the town's past, present, and future. Many textile heritage projects done in the name of economic development repurpose old mills by turning them into apartments, microbreweries, or boutique shopping centers. These sites symbolize progressive evolution through the affluent clienteles they serve, while the continued presence of the old building on the landscape represents a kind of continuity with the past. Murdock's plans for the North Carolina Research Campus, however, called for a wholesale demolition of the entire Cannon Mills complex – even the corporate headquarters and the reflecting pool that locals affectionately referred to as Town Lake. Establishing continuity would thus require different tactics. As in the 1970s, conversation quickly turned to a museum. The *Salisbury Post* reported in 2007 that "When asked if developers of the NC Research Campus had plans to honor the area's textile history as a way to encourage participation in the health study, [Murdock-owned development company] Castle & Cooke president Lynne Scott Safrit said leaders would reach out to a local history organization and other community groups. Murdock interrupted her and said he would build a facility for textile artifacts."[25] And as in the 1970s, the effort to use "the museum as a tool to develop man's future" quickly revealed historically produced conflicts in the present.

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[24] "How a Research Campus in North Carolina Deals with Ethical Questions on Biobanking," *PBS Newshou*r, May 21, 2016, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-a-research-campus-is-raising-ethical-questions-in-one-north-carolina-town.

[25] Ford Emily, "Murdock Offers to Build Facility for Textile Artifacts," *Salisbury Post*, September 25, 2007, NewsBank North Carolina.

The textile heritage publication, the *Mill Whistle*, noted in 2008 that "the Kannapolis History Associates were surprised by David H. Murdock's announcement that he would build a museum to preserve the town's textile heritage."[26] Their surprise turned out to be warranted. As has so often been the case, Murdock overpromised and underdelivered. The promised history museum, meanwhile, has taken up indefinite (but precarious) residence in a few windowless rooms in Kannapolis's A. L. Brown High School, staffed by an all-volunteer force. Ironically, the Cannon Visitor Center lives on in a more unadulterated form than almost any other aspect of the company whose permanence it was constructed to symbolize. Its exhibits form the backbone of the Kannapolis History Associates' museum, reflecting to the trickle of twenty-first century visitors an early-1970s conflict over public relations and public history. As of 2020, the Research Campus's website reported that the various labs currently renting space at the Research Campus employ just 1,000 people.[27]

Murdock has found debt to be a more efficient tool than museums for using the past to shape the future. Murdock offers his benevolence only on the condition that his beneficiaries demonstrate that they have financial skin in the game, an anathema to the ideological underpinnings of Cannon Mills' traditional form of communitarian paternalism. When Murdock announced a plan to build a new YMCA (Charles Cannon had built the original Kannapolis YMCA, which served as perhaps the most resonant and enduring symbol of the Cannon family's paternalism among Kannapolis residents) in 1983, he insisted that his

[26] "South's Largest Mill Town to Get a Museum Facility," *Mill Whistle*, February 2008, 3. The *Mill Whistle* is a publication of the textile heritage group known as the Honorary order of the Bobbin & Shuttle, whose whitewashing of problematic elements of mill town culture, particularly those relating to race, was the subject of Fink,"When Community Comes Homes to Roost: The Southern Milltown as Lost Cause."

[27] "About NCRC," North Carolina Research Campus, accessed February 8, 2020, https://transforming-science.com/transforming-science/.

contribution ought to be limited to "donating" the land, leaving it to the town to finance the $4 million cost of construction. The reaction of Jerry Shepherd, the YMCA's director, foreshadowed the fealty that twenty-first century Kannapolis elites would demonstrate to their new patriarch. Shepherd explained that where Charles Cannon would have simply built the new facility himself, "Murdock's philosophy is 'let's see some initiative out of you folks, rather than just giving a handout.'" Shepherd added, "But there's nothing wrong with that. It's the American Way."[28]

Murdock's neoliberal reinterpretation of Cannon-style paternalism was evident in a 2009 profile of Randy Crowell, the first ex-Cannon Mills worker to secure a position at the North Carolina Research Campus, which ran in the *Salisbury Post* and the Murdock-owned *Kannapolis Citizen and Researcher*. Research Campus boosters nodded to their textile industrialist predecessors even as they reshaped their rhetoric for a neoliberal labor market in which workers (and the public), not employers, are expected to bear the costs and risks of becoming worthy of the opportunity to make a decent wage in a meaningful job.[29] "We were very impressed with how focused he was, how he had re-tooled and retrained himself," explained Duke University genomics researcher, Dr. Simon Gregory. Crowell affirmed that "those 20 years in the mill benefit me every day," valorizing through his personal transformation into a knowledge worker the collective tragedies he and many of his fellow Kannapolis residents had experienced in the intervening years.[30] The Research Campus's

[28] Bell, "Barriers to Biotech."

[29] Emily Ford, "From Textiles to Test Tubes," *Kannapolis Citizen & Researcher*, May 2009.

[30] Ibid., 11. The story noted that after losing his job in the Pillowtex shutdown, Crowell went to work at the Duracell plant more than 30 miles away in Lexington, NC. When that plant shut down, Crowell experienced "a horrible time," and ultimately moved to Texas at age 48 to help his daughter care for her six-month-old son, who was born with severe birth defects where he began taking community college classes in the furtherance of what the article described as a childhood dream deferred. Having,

assumption of the town's textile heritage into its own story was both necessitated and complicated by the legacy of its patriarch, Murdock. "Crowell said he knows that some still blame Murdock for the downfall of textile manufacturing in Kannapolis," explained the piece's author, with Crowell adding: "What he's doing now should redeem that, but I don't know if it's going to. He could have done this anyplace and he chose Kannapolis." Asked what he would say to Murdock should he ever encounter him during one of his visits to the Research Campus, Crowell replied "I will thank him. He has enabled me to live out my dream."[31]

What is certain, however, is that the City of Kannapolis has been on a debt-fueled building spree since Murdock's return. Because the Research Campus has, as many predicted, struggled to attract research groups from more established centers, it threatened to become, as City Manager Mike Legg's explained in 2020, "a dead appendage that needed to be fixed."[32] It was "critical to the future growth of the campus," explained Legg, that the city "put the money into downtown to make it a more livable, walkable, workable place for people to visit and spend money and to enjoy." The centerpiece has been a city-owned $52 million minor league baseball stadium, complete with luxury skyboxes.[33] Calling the project "the catalyst we need to ensure the success of our vision," Kannapolis Mayor Darrell Hinnant announced, "This is an asset which will continue to bring long-term investments to our City

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like David Murdock, lost loved ones to cancer, seeing the disease under the microscope "enraged" him, and he told the reporter that "The possibility of making a real difference in human health and alleviating suffering and disease" is the best part of his job.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Cuthrell,"Brick by Brick," 39.

[33] Ibid. . In a triumph of textile heritage over NASCAR heritage, the minor league known from 1995-2019 as the "Kannapolis Intimidators" (a reference to Kannapolis native and NASCAR legend, Dale Earnhardt) will debut in 2020 as the Kannapolis Cannon Ballers.

for decades."[34] Kannapolis leaders readily admit that the purpose of their spending spree, which has seen the city's long-term debt increasing from $74 million in 2011 to $241 million in 2019, has been to reshape the town to conform to the demands of a class of wealthy outsiders put off by what *Business North Carolina* described as the Research Campus's "uninspired surroundings." As Mark Spitzer of David Murdock's Castle & Cooke real estate development firm explained, "One of the things I heard loudly was, 'We're doing good science here, but we're having difficulty recruiting folks because Kannapolis is a ghost town."[35]

Ironically, the legitimacy of Cannon Mills' communitarian paternalism had rested upon the belief that the company and its hierarchy insulated "the good people of Cannon Mills" from deceptive outsiders in a way that democratic governance could not. "I look around and see a town that doesn't have a city hall, mayor, or a board of alderman to meet monthly to think of ways to tax the people in Kannapolis," explained Cannon Mills worker Sam Lumsden in a 1974 letter to the editor of the Kannapolis *Daily Independent* in which he implored his fellow workers to vote against union representation in the impending National Labor Relations Board election.[36] "When I first came to work at Cannon Mills 11 years ago I was making $1.25 an hour and had less than $20 to my name. I still don't have a lot, but this is due to poor management on my part," which he considered to be preferable to having money appropriated from him to serve the ends of those "look[ing] for a free ride off of good people's money." Lumsden felt insulted by the union's suggestion that a better life in

[34] "Kannapolis is Ready to Play Ball," *Independent Tribune* (Concord, NC), September 25, 2018, https://www.independenttribune.com/news/kannapolis-is-ready-to-play-ball-council-approves-sports-and/article_675e55ec-c0d4-11e8-8207-934b16abd477.html

[35] Cuthrell,"Brick by Brick," 39.

[36] Sam Lumsden, letter to the editor, *Daily Independent*, November 18, 1974, 4.

Kannapolis was possible when "I can look around me and see many things that Cannon Mills has done without pressure from outsiders. … Those people have degraded our good people of Cannon Mills and low-rated them and then turned around and tried to make them think they are worth a million dollars by using cheap psychology on them." Each manifestation of Cannon Mills' control of the city's services, he explained, represented "money that we don't have to take out of our pockets …. Go ask the people in the Five Forks Community how hard they had to work to build a ball park for their community teams."[37]

Although studies of southern textile paternalism tend to focus on its effect on white working-class millworkers, the circumstances surrounding Murdock and the Research Campus's inheriting of the place of centrality in the story of Kannapolis reveals that the group most desperate for a new patriarch has not been rank-and-file workers, but local elites. "City leaders still marvel at their fortune," reported the *Charlotte Observer* in 2005 when Murdock announced his plans, "They quickly welcomed the biggest change in Kannapolis since James Cannon moved his fledgling mill operation there and founded the community nearly a century ago."[38] And yet 15 years later, Murdock's Kannapolis story stands, like the Visitor Center exhibits that now reside in the Kannapolis History Museum, as a relic of a particular historical moment that is becoming increasingly unmoored from the circumstances that gave birth to it. In January 2020, *Business North Carolina* wrote, "In any case, no one familiar with Kannapolis' history could have dreamed in 2003 that it would evolve from a classic collapse to a *potentially* [emphasis added] high tech future."[39] Perhaps not, although

[37] Ibid.

[38] Bell, "Billionaire on a Mission."

[39] Cuthrell,"Brick by Brick," 41.

even in the immediate aftermath of the shutdown, workers and local elites alike badly wanted to believe that a brighter chapter in their story lay ahead. Ray Moss, Mayor of Kannapolis at the time, told the *Salisbury Post* "it's hard to see something leave that you've always had. But to believe the happenings of 2003 are a springboard on which we're going to move into the future, I believe that with all my heart."[40] The imagined *potential* high-tech future Kannapolis elites project in 2020 has changed little from that of 2005. As City Manager Mike Legg told the *Observer* that year, "Mr. Cannon created jobs out of nothing. (Murdock's project) will transform an economy."[41]

With or without Murdock, the very economic transformation that brought on the demise of integrated textile manufacturers such as Cannon Mills continues apace. In August 2017, Kannapolis officials boasted that they had succeeded in inducing online retailing giant Amazon to construct an $85 million "Fulfillment Center" in Kannapolis.[42] Unlike the Research Campus, however, the Fulfillment Center, which opened in 2019, demands a substantial amount of the kind of deskilled labor left in the wake of deindustrialization. Although Kannapolis is hardly the only community to offer tax rebates to Amazon, there was a special irony in the Mayor of the Towel City's announcement of a $562,275 so-called "incentive grant" to one of the world's largest, richest, and most powerful companies. The leaders of a town that once boasted of the largesse of its economic and social anchor did not trade money for jobs reluctantly, but were, as Mayor Hinnant put it, "pleased to provide

[40] Scott Jenkins, "Closing Turned 4,300 Local Lives into Disarray," *Salisbury Post* (NC), December 31, 2003, NewsBank North Carolina.

[41] Bell, "Billionaire on a Mission."

[42] "Kannapolis Welcomes Amazon Distribution Center," news article, City of Kannapolis, August 14, 2017, https://www.kannapolisnc.gov/Community/News/ID/220/Kannapolis-Welcomes-Amazon-Distribution-Center

incentives that will result in over 600 jobs for people in Kannapolis and throughout the region."[43]

The death of Charles Cannon in 1971 left what the *Charlotte Observer* called in the days after his death "a void in Kannapolis, a gap among textile leaders, and an ache in the hearts of that family of men, women and children that he loved and provided for."[44] Reporting from a prayer service held at A. L. Brown High School in the aftermath of the Pillowtex shutdown in August 2003, the *Observer* noted that each prayer "had the same idea: Pillowtex's demise last week left a hole in the community, and those who attended Wednesday night's prayer rally hoped they could fill it with faith."[45] Legg, Hinnant, and other officials have spent fifteen years offering tributes to Murdock, but they have begun to wonder whether their faith will be rewarded. Although Murdock has, without a hint of irony, claimed that he plans to live to 125, he has slowed down in recent years.[46] His once-frequent visits to Kannapolis have grown fewer and farther between. In 2020, with Murdock fading from the center of what he once called "love of my life," Mayor Hinnant admitted to *Business North Carolina* that "his absence has created a sort of vacuum for combined leadership, and we've said over and over that there needs to be a centralized control factor."[47]

Benedict Anderson wrote in a 1991 addendum to his highly influential study of nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, that "the museum and the museumizing imagination are

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[43] "Kannapolis Welcomes Amazon Distribution Center."

[44] "Charlie Cannon: Family Man," *Charlotte Observer*, editorial, April 5, 1971. NewsBank North Carolina.

[45] Jaime Levy, "Workers Lose Jobs but Hang onto Faith," *Charlotte Observer*, August 7, 2003, NewsBank North Carolina.

[46] Bruni, "The Billionaire Who Is Planning His 125th Birthday."

[47] Cuthrell,"Brick by Brick," 41.

both profoundly political."[48] Museums and other forms of institutionalized memorializing are always historical productions of a particular culture and society, but they also inevitably function as vehicles for what Anderson called "political inheriting."[49] But in many cases, the identities of inheritors and the ways in which they have made use of their inheritance would have been inconceivable to those who left their relics to posterity.[50] Museumizing the story of Cannon Mills and Kannapolis in the 1970s was a conflict-ridden process, one that illustrates the impossibility–even for so-called experts–of creating a past, present, and future agreeable to every member of every public. The powerful and paternalistic company relied heavily upon feminized heritage laborers to conduct the ongoing work of narrative shaping, both within the Cannon Visitor Center's exhibits and in the associated plant tour. It remains to be seen how and when the next moment of political inheriting will play out in Kannapolis. Although attitudes vary widely among Kannapolis residents, many working people feel alienated from the present-day neoliberal paternalism of David Murdock and the endless stream of city-financed projects that feel like attempts to cater to the consumer tastes of affluent outsiders. They know that they are not the affluent consumer-citizens projected into digital renderings of a bustling downtown ballpark, nor are they the tenants of the new luxury apartment complex overlooking it (figure 5.1). Exasperated by the inescapable "there is no

[48] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 178.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Anderson's discussion of museums as political inheriting projects centered on Southeast Asia, where archaeologists from European colonial powers "discovered" ancient sites that the colonial administrations documented and turned into museums. Ironically, they helped cement the artificial but nonetheless deeply vision of national pasts around which nationalist movements organized their ultimately successful campaigns for home-rule. Anderson found that rather than treating the museums as a relic of imperialism and colonialism (which they no doubt were), postcolonial elites appropriated them for their own purposes, for their own power depended upon the legitimacy of a nationalism imagined into existence as colonial subjects.

alternative" boosterist ethic that has long pervaded the development discourse both locally and globally, Kannapolis resident Jessica Dorsett took to the comment section of a University of North Carolina at Charlotte-sponsored city planning blog in 2016 to vent her frustration. In her response to an article entitled "Kannapolis, The Town that Towels Built, Faces its Future," Dorsett expressed her intentions to disinherit herself from the future being built in her name for someone else:

> The reason cannon village abs [and] the rest of downtown is under 50% occupancy isn't cuz peeple don't visit. I LIVE on south ridge. It's a busy downtown! The problem is that the city is money hungry. Rent is WAY too high for businesses so they move to the out skirts or to concord. We've personally talked to owners. .... [elipses hers] I know it's true. But yet the restaurant 46 [an upscale restaurant reminiscent of those found in the trendy neighborhoods of much larger cities] that is never busy is charged about half of what other places are. I hope that's still not true. But I certainly hope your little plan works. If the value of my home goes up my happy ass is moving to the country.[51]

[51] Jessica Dorsett, comment on Mary Newsome, "Kannapolis, The Town that Towels Built, Faces its Future," *Plan Charlotte* (blog), University of North Carolina at Charlotte Urban Institute, May 10, 2016, https://plancharlotte.org/story/kannapolis-nc-city-planner-purchase-downtown

Figure 5.1. Digital rendering of the city-owned Kannapolis Sports and Entertainment Venue in downtown Kannapolis. On February 5, 2020, the city announced that it had leased the naming rights to the Atrium Health hospital system. The Kannapolis Cannon Ballers will begin play there in 2020. Rendering by Populous (architecture firm), 2018, accessed April 25, 2020, https://populous.com/kannapolis-breaks-ground-populous-designed-sports-entertainment-venue.

As Kannapolis leaders continue their expensive search for a new patriarch and new, more affluent subjects, there has emerged another group of Kannapolis citizens who have dedicated themselves to "continuing the quest for history untold."[52] As of February 2020, the moniker of the Kannapolis African-American Museum and Cultural Center (KAA-MaCC) remains an aspirational one – like the white-dominated Kannapolis History Associates who preserve the traditional Cannon Mills narrative from their precarious site in A. L. Brown High School, KAA-MaCC has had difficulty securing a suitable permanent site.[53] Although black workers had visibly integrated themselves into the present state of Cannon Mills and

[52] Kannapolis African-American Museum & Cultural Center, Inc., accessed February 12, 2020, https://www.kaa-macc.org/.

[53] Ibid.

Kannapolis by the 1970s, the history of black people has been all but invisible in official histories of the company and town. Among the many debates Holt's post-Charles Cannon regime engaged in as they attempted to present the history of the company, its products, and its people, it was taken for granted that black people's history could not fit within that story. Rather than attempting to claim a meager inheritance by insisting upon more diversity and inclusion in the patriarchal authorized history of their community, KAA-MaCC has begun the important work of envisioning a past in which peoples' histories need not be valorized by institutions that can only feign permanence. "History untold" does not hold the solutions to the problems its inheritors must reckon with, but it is through history untold that visionary people can seize from patriarchs, past and present, the ability to conceive of a future as yet unimagined.

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Vita

William Cranford Raby grew up in Charlotte, North Carolina. Will received a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Appalachian State University in 2013, where he was a four-year letterman with the Mountaineers' Cross Country and Track and Field program and a scoring member of three Southern Conference Championship-winning teams.

In 2014, Will began his professional career as an Associate Business Analyst at a multinational insurance company. To signify his moral commitment to developing his human capital, he studied on weekends in his successful pursuit of the Chartered Property and Casualty Underwriter (CPCU) designation, an "elite distinction" according to the American Institute of Chartered Property and Casualty Underwriters.

Will began plotting his escape from the insurance industry shortly after his employer implemented a postindustrial version of what textile workers referred to as "the stretch-out." He returned to Appalachian State in August 2017 to pursue a Master of Arts in History. From 2017-2019, he worked as the Graduate Assistant Coach for the men's and women's Cross Country and Track and Field teams during the school years and as a Resident Advisor with the Upward Bound program during the summers. Will graduated from Appalachian State in May 2020 and will begin his PhD studies in History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in August 2020.